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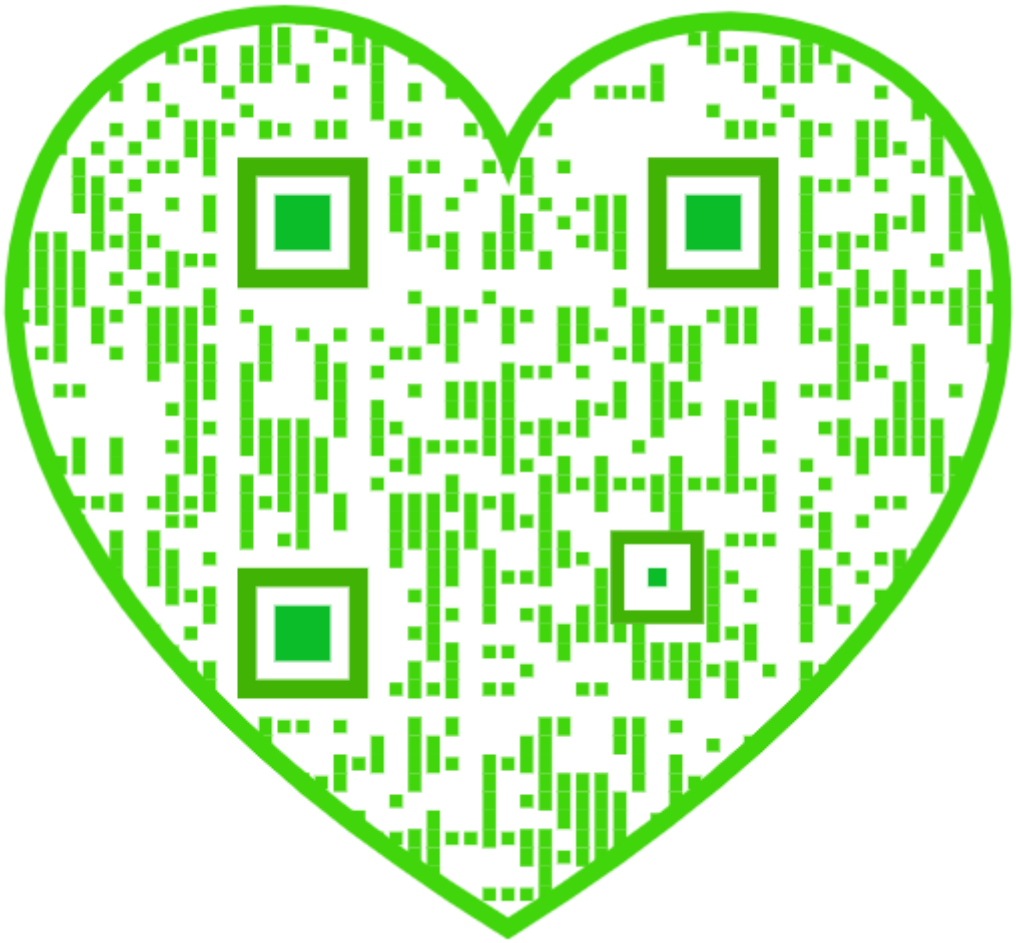

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HOMESTEADING
TWO PRAIRIE SEASONS

THE CALL OF THE WEST:

LETTERS FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA

By Capt. C. F. J. GALLOWAY

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HOMESTEADING:

TWO PRAIRIE SEASONS

BY

EDWARD WEST

WITH 32 ILLUSTRATIONS

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EXPLANATORY NOTE

In the following pages I have tried to picture, from actual experience, something of the life in its early stages of the settler on the Canadian prairie.

All the earlier chapters of the book, including the remarks to the reader which follow this note, were written prior to the fateful August 1914, when the writing was soon dropped as being inopportune.

Recently, however, a Canadian farmer visiting me, after reading what I had written, urged me to complete the work, and I was further encouraged to do so by the thought that even now there must be some whose views for the future are towards a home on the prairie, and that when blessed peace comes again there will probably be a flood of emigration Westward, as was the case after the Franco-German War of 1871.

Events move rapidly in these days, and in spite of the shadow of war I understand that during the last three years changes for the better, in the directions I ventured to suggest, have taken

place, and to some of these I have made a brief reference in the concluding chapter.

Alas, there are changes of a different nature.

Among the thousands of graves in Flanders is that of the "Sunny Jim" of this little narrative, and I fear those of other neighbours whose names are unknown to me, while one has long been a prisoner in Germany.

THE AUTHOR.

WINSCOMBE, SOMERSET.

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TO THE READER

ARE you a young man of spirit, tired of the daily round of office or shop, and tempted by eloquent lectures, Government emigration booklets, or descriptions of summer tourists to try your fortune on the great Canadian prairies?

Or are you an overworked paterfamilias, who, while realizing that for yourself and beloved helpmate the prospects of improvement from such a change are very doubtful, is inclined to think that for the sake of your large and growing family it might be well, while in the prime of life, to make a move to a less crowded land?

Perchance you are a farmer's son, longing to own your own farm, or one of the much-talked-of farm labourers earning from twelve to sixteen shillings a week, with a sweetheart or a growing family, which makes the Saturday's pay look very small indeed.

Well, to you two last mentioned, Canada may indeed be the Land of Hope; but let me tell you "right here" that you are the prime birds those great sportsmen, the Canadian vested interests,

are especially after, for without men of your class the alluring dividends of manufacturing companies, banks, and railways would soon dwindle. So you may as well know your value to Canada at once.

Or perhaps you have dear friends or relatives pioneer farming in Saskatchewan or Manitoba or Alberta, nobly subduing nature to man's use, who find but little time to write details of their lives to you, for they are engaged in heroic work, and are for the most part heroes and heroines, though the last to recognize themselves as such. Should the following pages help you to understand their lives and increase your sympathy towards them, the author will be well repaid, for he has many friends among them.

Or possibly you are one who, like the writer, for some reason has had unexpectedly to return to the Old Country, and after reading a page or two drop into prairie speech and remark: "Gee-whiz! this fellow talks to beat the band, but I didn't see things like this"; and if you go on reading you may wonder why there is so little about the marvellous towns and their rapid growth, of great chances to grow rich, speculating in real estate, and many other marvels of the Great West.

Well, Canada is a fine country, but there is

so much of it that one cannot generalize, and my observations were confined to one district where I lived and worked.

Now, it seems to the writer that while there are plenty of books dealing with past history and telling of rapid growth in modern days, also many interesting travellers' tales and some good works of fiction, there is plenty of room for more details of the actual life of the thousands who annually leave our shores and settle down to pioneer farming on the open prairie, and it is the experience of such that I wish to describe.

Come then, one and all who care to read these pages, and let us try in imagination to visit or revisit a tiny bit of that wonderful new land and the true-hearted men and women who are doing their part in laying the foundations of a great new nation.

HOMESTEADING

CHAPTER I

WEST BOUND

THE door opened and a young man entered, just an ordinary young Britisher, such as one sees by dozens during the dinner-hour in the cafés of our large towns. He had been a grammar-school boy, but was now three-and-twenty, full grown and fairly well proportioned, if somewhat slender.

We had a very slight acquaintance, and I felt a mild surprise at his entrance, but he soon broke silence by remarking, as he dropped into a chair, "I heard you were off to Canada again, and thought I would give you a call."

His tone arrested my attention, and I said, after a few seconds, "My next visit home will find you head of a department, with a fine salary and a growing family perhaps—eh?"

He stood up, thrust his hands into his pockets, and remarking, "Excuse me, but look here," went

on: "I've stuck to this job pretty well for five years, but there are a lot in our place better than me, and they hold on like limpets. Then there are brothers and sisters coming on with the same chances—the boys with perhaps thirty bob a week when they are five-and-twenty; and as for the girls—there! I don't call it good enough; and as I'm no hand at beating about the bush, the long and short of it is, I looked in to say, if you'll have me, I'll go along with you."

After a pause he added, "Of course, I'm not such a duffer as to think things may not be worse over there, but I've talked to you before, and other fellows, and you say there are chances, and I've made up my mind to try it."

He had been fully charged, and after the explosion silence fell on us for a few minutes, and my thoughts ran rapidly over what he had told me.

At last I said:

"Well, Tom—by the by, I suppose I may call you Tom, and you may call me Jack—provided the old folks at home are not against your going and you feel quite well and fit, I shall be glad to have you, for a good chum is well worth having; but I fear you will have to listen to much that may sound humdrum, though it will probably come in useful, all the same."

DECK QUOITS.

To face p. 16.

"I can say 'Yes, yes' to all that, Jack," he replied; "but one thing I want to say: I do want to get on the land, and because I heard that you were going to homestead, and I knew you had some experience, I came to you. Fellows tell me there are better chances in the towns for a chap like me, but it is the life on the land that attracts."

"That's so, Tom," said I, "and in the long run we may be right, but we are not choosing the soft job." Then I said, "But if we mean homesteading, we must talk a little business; how does your credit balance stand?"

"Well, I've got just the even hundred pounds," said Tom.

"I can put the same in," said I, and went on: "You see, it's like this: chaps do go out and homestead with practically no cash, though they gain in experience while they are doing it, and if you were going alone or with a green hand, I would say, 'Put your money in the bank and go to work first,' for nothing one can tell or that you read in books takes the place of actual experience."

I continued: "This is January, and as we ought to be out there early in April, we had better book our passages at once, as the rush is on then, and if we leave it much longer we may

get left. Any regular liner will do, and as every dollar is of consequence to us, we will book third class, and as such passengers we shall probably be most comfortable in one of the newer boats, so we will try for one of them.

"As for outfit, take all your ordinary clothing, but leave behind such things as leggings or knickerbockers, or anything that would advertise you as distinctively English. Bring along a good shot-gun, and two or even three blankets or rugs, packing these where you can get at them, as you may be glad of them on the long train journey and in the winter. Also bring a plate, knife, fork, spoon, and cup—enamel things are the sort. You might slip in a nice tin of tongue, and I'll get some tea and sugar and canned fruit; you'll see the good of these little details later on."

"Where would you book to on the other side?" said Tom.

"Well," said I, "the country is so big and new, and the conditions change so much, that it is not easy to answer that question, and as hardly any one really knows the country and nearly every settler is inclined to boom his own district, and may have some special axe to grind, getting accurate and reliable information is not a very hopeful job, in spite of Government

SNAP-SHOT OF OUR FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

To face p. 18.

agencies. There's the B—— district in Saskatchewan: good land, rolling, even hilly in places, with water generally to be got for the digging, and in many parts plenty of timber near. This is an important point at first, and as I know that part to be pretty good, though there may be better, suppose we go there?"

"That sounds well, Jack," said Tom; "but as locality is important, tell me a bit more about it, as to why you like it."

"Well, Tom," said I, "this matter is one on which we should be careful not to dogmatize, but I think in the future settlers should choose a district suitable for mixed farming, and that's one great recommendation for this district. Then the country is being settled up fairly fast by a hardy lot of immigrants of various nationalities, many of them English, and railway construction is fairly brisk. You must remember Western Canada is a young country, with young people chiefly, who are for the most part learning as they go on; and, after all, this is what we must do, though I can tell you some things that may smooth the way a bit, and I don't think we shall make a mistake, Tom, if we book to B——."

"Right you are, Jack; take the tickets, by all means."

A few weeks rapidly slipped away, and on a bright, cold, breezy morning in the middle of March, Tom and I stood on the great landing-stage at Liverpool, our passage tickets safely in our respective pockets, and modest drafts on the bank at B——, together with a few spare dollars in Canadian money, snugly stowed away next our respective persons (a not unwise precaution). We also carried vouchers for the railway ticket on the other side.

Very wisely our people had said "farewell" at home, for in most cases seeing one's friends off, with its waiting about to see the ship sail and the trying return journey, is an unpleasant business.

For the traveller the case is different, for, whether old or young, man or woman, there is usually in most a touch of that spirit which, as Kingsley said of the east wind, "drives our English hearts of oak seaward round the world," and as a Canadian poet has said, "Though we may look askance at the lone trail, the lone trail lures us on." And let us rid our minds of any idea we may entertain that such thoughts apply to us of British lineage only. As we walk up and down the long stage we may note Germans, Russians, many voyagers from the Baltic provinces of continental Europe, the women and

A GROUP OF SCANDINAVIANS.

To face p. 20.

children seated on their baggage in more or less picturesque dress—possibly some Iceland folk in still more picturesque garb; but perhaps the finest figures in all the crowd are the Danes and Scandinavians. These, be it noted, with their strong, well-knit frames, often come from the forests, farms, and fisheries of that hard Norse land, and are splendidly fitted for the grim wrestle with Nature that awaits all who aspire to carve out a farm from the great Canadian prairie and make a home there. But who are those fellows with fur coats and caps, or perhaps only an unobtrusive fur collar showing? They are returning Canadians, and if we can get some chats with the right sort, they should be well worth listening to; but beware of the "bounders."

To some the scene may seem commonplace, but let us reflect for a few moments how, week after week, indeed almost daily, these great steamers leave, carrying hundreds of thousands ever Westward to this great new land, not from Liverpool only, but also from Glasgow, Bristol, London, besides continental ports.

The annual Canadian immigration has, I believe, for some years now been upwards of 300,000, enough to provide in ten years a population for ten cities of 300,000 each, or thirty of 100,000 each. And who are the people who

are going? Not, as in some past periods of colonial history, a vicious and criminal class, who "left their country for their country's good," but mostly the flower of the British Isles and Europe.

Although many have been town-dwellers, they or their immediate forbears are sprung from what Goldsmith calls "the hardy peasantry, which once destroyed can never be supplied"; enterprising, energetic, and ambitious, and on the whole too young to have had their minds cramped by mere formulas. And though they may not carry much capital in money, they often have a good round sum, and the fact that they pay their passages, and often that of a family, means that, generally speaking, they are not drawn from the class that lives from hand to mouth.

"Looks rather good for Canada, the Flag, and the Empire, doesn't it?" said Tom.

"Been thinking imperially, eh?" said I.

"Rather," said he.

"That's all right," I replied, "but you know there are different ways of doing that; and don't you think that sometimes nations are apt to wave their respective flags a bit too much? Take, for instance, ourselves, the United States, and Canada. Now, for my part, I love to think of them as the mother,

AMUSING THE CHILDREN.

To face p. 22.

with her older and younger daughter, and when one looks at what they have in common, is it wise to make much of a little difference in the colour of bunting?"

"But surely, Jack," said Tom, "devotion to the flag of your country is a fine thing?"

"Look," said I, "at those Stars and Stripes flying from the mainmast of that Cunarder, bound to New York, and at the red ensign of our merchant service flying from the flagstaff aft. Do you see that, though a different pattern, they are both red, white, and blue, and don't you remember that old Christian legend of the red and blue cross on the white ground, the mantle of St. John de Matha, which, set as a sail, bore a cargo of slaves to a land of freedom and justice? Now, if our flags still stand for those two things, combined with full recognition of the rights of others and the will to do unto others as we would be done by, let us be devoted to our flags by all means. And now think of Canada and her elder sister, the United States, in relation to our old land, the Mother of Parliaments—all in a broad sense sprung from the same races, with one language, one literature, and may we not add practically one faith also; with many close family ties, and, to drop to a lower plane, with enormous financial and commercial inter-relation-

ships. I think you will see that between the old mother and her two daughters, as I call them, there is no room for any mere flag-waving, though you may find even some citizens of the Great Republic and Canadians who are not free from it."

"Come to think of it, I reckon you are about right," said Tom.

"Just another word as a send-off," said I, "and I've done. Between Europe and America, as represented by the States and Canada, there is this great difference: that so far, thanks to wise statesmanship in the past, the latter has been able to keep itself clear of the terrible military and naval burdens Europe groans under. Think of the five thousand miles of frontier practically without a soldier, and compare that with the state of Europe, and ask yourself how it is possible in the future for her to compete successfully with that continent, under such conditions."

"Yes," said Tom; "I've heard this firework business costs Europe £600,000,000 every year, and, come to think of it, the handicap does seem pretty big; but they have not the population."

"True," said I, "but they are growing by leaps and bounds. However, all this sort of talk won't get us across the Atlantic and on to our homesteads, and here comes our big ship,

SNAP-SHOT OF OUR FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

To face p. 24.

dropping alongside the stage. She seems to have some passengers who have gone on board at the dock, but the gangways will soon be run on board for us, and *we* had better get on as soon as we can, though there is no need to crowd and push."

Needless is it to dwell on the departure, voyage, and arrival, a trying, and to some even a terrible experience; to many a time of mingled joy and sorrow; yet to others, especially old voyagers, such times are full of delights which never seem to grow stale by repetition.

The intense bustle of embarkation, the crowds of visitors, the rattle of the steam winches as they hoist tons and tons of baggage on board, followed by the bellow of the siren and the note of bugle or gong warning all visitors to go ashore; the last farewells, and then, as the throngs who line the rails and bulwarks look down on the crowded landing-stage or quay, the few minutes of quiet and almost silence, very impressive compared with the preceding noisy activity, are incidents of never-failing interest. A wave of a hand from the captain or pilot, and one by one the hawsers are let go, the tugs are slowly breasting the great ship off the stage; there is a great waving of handkerchiefs, the bridge telegraph-bell tinkles in the engine-room, the pro-

pellers give their first revolutions, the last cheer is raised from the landing-stage and returned from the ship, and we are off.

The voyage is soon over, with two or three days of unpleasant weather perhaps, or possibly we meet a gale and get a good bit of knocking about, and then gradually slip into smoother water and fog as we cross the banks.

If we are wise we keep clear of cards; there are deck quoits, and many a tired mother will be thankful if we can amuse the children by helping them to skip or otherwise. We are probably too early to see bergs that drift from far north, and we certainly are for going up the noble Gulf and River of St. Lawrence to Quebec and Montreal, so we must land at St. John's, and as this means a still longer railway journey than from the former ports, we shall be wise to make ourselves as comfortable as we can right from the start. With this end in view we will ask those two pleasant young fellows to whom we were talking to join us on the colonist car, unless indeed we went in a tourist; but that costs more. You see, the difference between a tourist or colonist car and an ordinary day car, from our point of view, is that in the former you can make up beds, and such cars are fitted with cooking-stoves, while, though the latter may look to have beau-

LAND HO!

To face p. 26.

tifully upholstered seats, you cannot make them into beds, and to have to sit up night and day for a journey of seventy hours or more is no joke.

Then the cooking-stove may be a great help if properly worked; and here our knives, forks, and small supply of food, which we can add to and replenish, come in, making us independent of wild rushes to wayside restaurants, with hasty gobbling up of such food as we can get hold of—if, indeed, similar raids from previous trains have left any for us.

"Yes," said Tom, as we arranged with our young friends, who were going through, "the railroad circulars have made a great talk of these colonist cars and their comparative comfort, but, as I understand, they are always available."

"So I once thought," said I; "but it does not always seem to work out so; they run short of such cars, or for their own purposes change you from one car to another. But what are all those people looking at?—the land, I suppose. Yes, there it is."

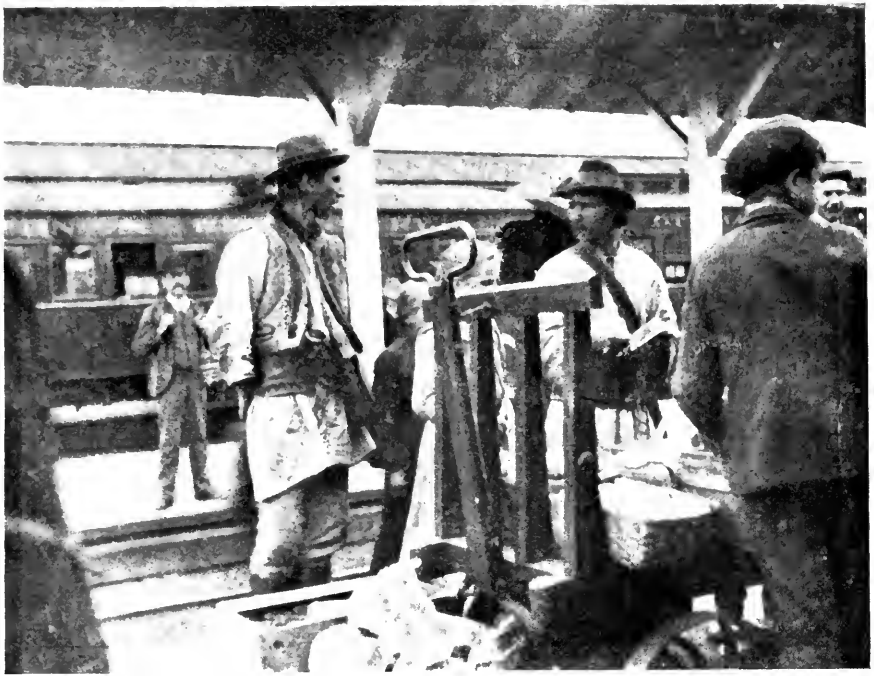
There is always something exhilarating in the sight of land after an ocean voyage, even in these days of swift steamers; and to the many who for the first time are looking on their adopted country, such an experience may mean much more. To the "matter of fact" it will not

mean much, but to others of a more imaginative turn, some of the environment of a life to which they have looked forward for many years may begin to materialize.

A few more hours brings us alongside the wharf, and the usual medical and official examination is courteously made, though with some care, for Canada wants none of the really unfit. Then comes the baggage examination of the Customs, often rigorous enough to seem ridiculous to a Free-trade Briton, but usually amounting to little to the genuine settler landing for the first time.

One of us purchases bread, butter, fruit, and other food supplies, while the other three are fortunate enough to secure a section in a nice colonist car, and having checked our baggage, tickets have been taken in exchange for our vouchers, and we have begun the railroad journey of some three thousand miles or so.

We find ourselves seated two and two, face to face, on fairly roomy if hard seats, which draw out at night and make a six-foot-long bed for two, while overhead a shelf of similar length and width lets down for the other two; far from luxurious, of course, but with rugs and coats good enough for men prepared to rough it, as all should be who tackle the prairie life.



PROVISIONING FOR THE JOURNEY.

To face p. 28.

Later on in the day we get the stove lighted and make ourselves some tea, and have a meal, and when night has passed and we have had a good sleep, followed by a wash and breakfast, we come to the conclusion that if we can travel in the same car through to Winnipeg, and are wise enough to keep it decently clean and well aired, we shall get on famously.

Needless to dwell on the journey. We pass towns and farmhouses, mingled with field and forest, stream and lake, in rapid succession, for the most part still under snow. Were it a little later in the year, perhaps men at work in the fields would give the incoming settlers a wave of the hand and a welcoming shout as the great train thunders past them.

When travelling on the C.P.R., Ottawa is a good place to provision again for the stretch to Winnipeg, and after passing this, with its fine Parliament buildings, of which we got a glimpse, we soon ran into that wilderness of lake, rock, and forest, stretching for hundreds of miles, which seems to defy man to make use of it, and may well make the new-comer wonder what strange land he has come to.

We were favoured to skirt the shore of Lake Superior during the evening hours, as the sun hung a gradually sinking golden ball of glory

over the lake, making a radiant and shining path across a part of the great inland sea, whose waters wash its rocky shore as the Atlantic does the Cornish coast, we got one of those glorious views that live in our memory to our last days.

Soon after passing this rugged strip of coast, with its sharp railroad curves, rock cuttings, and trestle bridges, we reached Fort William and Port Arthur, through whose mammoth elevators the bread-stuff for millions finds its way to the world's markets. Suggested by the sight of these, our talk drifts on to the question of outlets and transportation facilities for the present and probable future production of these immense areas of fertile soil. Our car conductor, who finds time to join in the conversation, is naturally all for improving the railroad facilities to and through the Eastern Provinces, and he points out that on a good track the big modern locomotive could haul a hundred thirty-ton cars, and asks "is not that nearly or quite as cheap as water transport." He is reminded, however, that the railroads are in the habit of working for their shareholders. A citizen from Dakota is all for J. J. Hill's railroads across the border, saying "that way you get ice-free ports all the year round," but some one remarks that while much doubtless goes that way in

ALL ABOARD.

To face p. 30.

bond, his idea will work better when the tariff walls of both his country and Canada go down.

Another traveller in the little group is loud in praise of the Pacific ports.

"For my part," said I, "I have great faith in the Hudson Bay route to Europe, if it is given a fair chance. By it you save from the greater part of the Prairie Provinces to Europe a thousand miles of rail haul. True, there are said to be dangers, but it is well known the St. Lawrence route, especially through the Strait of Belle Isle, is not free from such, and the Hudson Bay Company have, I believe, been sending ships for two hundred years with very few losses. It is also an interesting thought that this route is on the line of that North-West Passage to the East which British navigators dreamed of and sought for so many weary years, and which may, with the aid of railroad facilities, even now in progress, become an accomplished fact."

A few hours later, and forest, rock, and lake begin gradually to give way to flat, open spaces, and it is interesting to notice how little by little the country changes into the open prairie, with farms here and there; and soon the great train rolls into Winnipeg.

The morning is a beautiful one, and as we

approach this modern city of the plain, "Tom," said I, "we are pretty sure to have a few hours to spend here, and we will have a run up to Eaton's."

"I have heard of Eaton's—a big store, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," said I, "and something more than the ordinary big department store to many prairie-folk, for their catalogue is sometimes spoken of as the prairie-woman's Bible. Besides catering for the ladies, they supply tools, harness, many implements, and an immense variety of such wares as the settler and farmer need. Then, as they do an immense trade for cash, or rather, prepayment, their prices to the fortunate ones able to pay cash are usually much lower than those of the local stores. People living a long way from any store at all find it very convenient to get goods sent out by mail, or to their local station, to wait to be called for as opportunity serves."

So at the great store we invest in some brown canvas overalls, which we can wear instead of our cloth clothes in the hot weather, also some leather gloves, as it is well and usual to use them for working in; and Tom, who says he does not mind a heavy hat, buys a "Stetson," good value, though for myself I prefer a lighter and

LAKE SUPERIOR.

To face p. 32.

ONTARIO SCENE.

To face p. 32.

softer headgear. On request, one of the larger catalogues is handed us—a very useful article, both as a means of ordering in future and checking the prices asked in country stores, on which subject, more probably later.

After a run round some of the principal streets of this fine and growing city, and a look at what remains of old Fort Garry, whence within so few years the dog teams of the Hudson Bay Company used to start out on their long winter journeys, we make our way to the new Union Station, and take our seats in the Canadian Northern train for the last trip of some six hundred miles.

As the train pulls out we notice St. Boniface, from whose former "turrets twain, the bells of the Mission called to the boatman on the river, the hunter on the plain."

On this train we shall probably get no colonist car, and as we cannot afford the luxury of a sleeper and meals in the palatial diner, we must make the best we can of the night in our seats and snacks at restaurant stations, though the remains of our other provision or a few sandwiches may come in very handy.

The morning comes at length, after an uneasy night, and though the air outside the car is keen, it is exhilarating and refreshing; the

snow still lies in patches where it has drifted, but is evidently going fast.

Towards evening we cross another line at a town of which a few years ago there were great hopes held, but which so far have not materialized, and having previously crossed the South Saskatchewan, we now a little later cross the North fork of that fine river; and as the train runs along the bank, gradually descending, and the sun is now setting, the view is very striking.

CHAPTER II

LOCATING A HOMESTEAD

THE clang! clang! clang! of the locomotive bell, which we had so often heard during the last few days, warned us that once more we were pulling into a station, and as it must be our destination, we seized our hand-baggage and were soon making our way with other travellers, through mud ankle-deep, towards a building that looked like an enormous box turned upside down, with rows of little square holes cut out to receive the windows.

The town of B——, having a Land Office and being a divisional point on the railroad, has at least one hostelry superior to those common to the general run of prairie towns; this, however, being frequented by the real estate speculators, drummers, as the commercial travellers are called, and that financial element which pervades a prairie town on "the boom," and we being only poor settlers, it became us to put up at a humbler white box, typical of the ordinary hotel.

On entering, we found ourselves in a large room, on one side of which was a desk or counter, where the clerk was registering our fellow-travellers, and while waiting our turn, we noticed the counter was continued on the other side of a partition, where it forms the counter of the bar.

On our side of the partition, in the centre of the room, stood a large stove, around which were seated two or three men in blue jean or brown canvas overalls; others were seated along the side of the room in similar dress. They sat with their felt hats on and their legs stretched out; one or two were bearded, but the rest were clean-shaven, and the faces of all were bronzed with exposure to the sun and wind.

The clerk told us he was so full he could only give us a bed in a room with several others, an apartment such as is known colloquially as "the ram pasture." After our long journey, more privacy would have been acceptable, but it was a case of "Hobson's choice."

The bell for supper, as the third and last meal of the day is called, now rang; the dining-room door was opened, and following the crowd in, we found ourselves seated at a small square table side by side with a tall, dark-haired man, who, though coatless and collarless, silently, but courteously, handed us sugar and milk. We had

just time to note that he was of the French-Canadian type, with perhaps a touch of still darker hue, when the vacant chair at our table was taken by a young fellow with an intelligent, somewhat thin face. He had on a brown canvas overall jacket, and though his dress did not indicate it, there was something unmistakably Anglo-Saxon about him.

"Hello, C——!" said the new-comer to the darker man; "what brings you to town?"

"Cattle," replied the other. "Just brought in fifty head, and got 'em shipped, too."

"Good for you," said the first speaker, and added, with a smile on his bright face: "Heard you had a stroke of luck. Hope all goes well, eh?"

The other looked up with an answering smile. "I figure you mean the kid," said he. "That's so; a fine boy, and, I tell you, baching isn't a patch on that sort of thing."

Then the talk became less personal, and the other, who was a younger man, spoke of the Grain Growers' Association and Co-operative Elevators, and one soon realized that the intelligent face of the speaker had a touch of ideality.

"Any homesteads still open your way?" said I, as a pause came in their talk.

The man in the canvas jacket looked at me,

then at Tom, and also glanced at his companion. Then he said:

"I come in from about forty miles east, and my friend from about eight miles further east; about us they have been pretty well picked over, but there are a few fairly good that may be worth your while looking at, and if you come along we can put you in the way of seeing them. My name is ——; address, K—— Post Office," he added, as we left the room.

The morning following, feeling refreshed by a good night's sleep and a good breakfast, we sat ourselves down in a quiet corner to talk of our plans.

"Well, Jack," said Tom, "how do we proceed to take possession of these presentation farms this benevolent Canadian Government is going to bestow on us? I don't suppose they give them away with a pound of tea, do they?"

"Well, Tom," said I, "the Government does publish maps, which they mail you from Ottawa, if you write for them, and I wish we had a set, for they are fine things; but there is no time to get them now, so after paying our little capital into the bank we will go to the Land Office for this district. After that the trouble will begin. We might make up a pack with a blanket and

a few bits of grub, and chance sleeping under a haystack, or a shakedown at some settlers', who are mostly kind and hospitable, and generally loath to take payment, though by no means invariably so."

"However, the prospect of a hundred miles or so of tramping in doubtful weather don't appeal to me; how about hiring a rig and driver, and getting him to show us round?" said Tom.

"Many do that," I replied; "but finding just what we want may or may not take us a good many days, and this plan might easily cost us fifty to a hundred dollars, or even more, which perhaps we could save."

"How would you work it, then?" asked Tom.

"If we mean working our homesteads ourselves," I replied, "we must have a team of some sort, and what's the matter with getting one, with a wagon and tent, and doing a bit of outfitting at the start? We shall then be more independent, and I figure it will be a cheaper proposition."

"Looks like my education is going to begin," remarked Tom.

At the Land Office we were shown maps, on which were indicated large numbers of homesteads open for entry, as it is called, in various parts of the district; and we made quite a long

list of such items as "S.W. quarter of 47. II. W. of Third," which, Tom remarked, might be a new rendering of the first proposition of Euclid, for all he knew. Much more information we did not get, and making our way back to our white box, stood on the sidewalk outside for a few minutes, watching motor-cars and horses and ox-teams and wagons ploughing through the deep mud.

"Jemima!" said Tom; "but I would like to see Smith & Co., my old governor, in his tall hat, kid gloves, delicate little boots and beautiful spats, and the flower in his buttonhole, crossing that street."

"Saw the prospectus of a loan for the Municipality of B—— in the English papers before we sailed; let's hope Smith & Co. will subscribe and help to make the streets more like Winnipeg's best," I returned, and then added: "Here comes our idealistic young friend. I rather like that young fellow—he looks pretty practical too, this morning," said I. "He is heading for us; let us see what he has to say."

"Morning," said he, stopping in front of us. "I didn't like to speak last night, as I guessed you had only just landed here; but the fact is, if you two mean homesteading, I have a fine team of oxen that it's worth your while to have

a look at, any way. Of course, you may be wanting horses, but I dare say you know that in the early stages there is a lot to be said for oxen in preference to horses, when you reckon up the cost of a good team of the latter—and a poor team is not much account."

"Do you propose a co-operative deal?" said Tom, smiling.

The other turned towards him quickly, and noting Tom's pleasant face, replied, "Well, no; though that's a good proposition, too, in its place."

"No harm in having a look at 'em," said I, and we followed the young man to a livery barn, where, in a somewhat dimly lighted stall, we made out two huge shapes.

"I'll have 'em out for you to see them properly directly," said their proprietor, "but I want to tell you why I am selling. The fact is, my cousin and I have horses now; we began three years ago with oxen, and made the mistake of getting some half-broken brutes, and I can tell you we had a high old time with them; then we got this pair ready broken from a fine old French-Canadian rancher, and they helped the others and have been splendid, and we have done a big lot of stoning, breaking, ploughing, and freighting with them."

Untying them, he led them out into the bright

sunlight; one was almost entirely white, the other almost entirely black, and both had magnificent horns and stood nearly as high as an ordinary man. They seemed perfectly quiet, but as they swung their great heads and sniffed a little as they looked at Tom (who was standing near), with that mildly inquisitive but almost indescribable look in their great eyes so peculiar to oxen, it was amusing to see that young man hastily step back, to the evident amusement of one of the bystanders.

At this moment our attention was attracted by a wagon loaded with lumber board, which at some distance down the street had sunk into the mud almost up to the axles. To it were attached two struggling, plunging horses, which their driver was vainly urging to further efforts.

"Chance to try your bulls, Bob," remarked a bystander to their owner, who, walking a few steps towards the wagon, shouted to the driver:

"Hello, boss! unhitch your team and let my bulls shift it for you."

The man, who was seated on the top of his load, turned round on hearing himself hailed, paused for a few moments to take in the situation, then, briskly jumping down, began unhitching his horses. Meanwhile collars were quickly put on the bulls, and their proprietor, taking

the lines, drove them to the wagon, where they stepped into their places with ease. Chains were hooked on, our young friend sprang up on the load, some one handed him a whip, and, with a cheery "Get up, boys!" the great beasts leaned against their collars, something went "snap," and the big white bull on the off side went down on his knees.

"Pretty rotten harness that!" said a bystander.

"Want some buffalo-hide stuff for that pair," remarked another.

However, the damage was soon repaired, and once more the chains tightened; there was a cut or two with the whip, a straining of the great flanks, and the front wheels rose an inch or two, and then ploughed through the black, sticky mud until they reached a firmer piece of road, where, in answer to a loud "Whoa!" the animals stopped.

"It strikes me we shall do well to have that pair, if our young friend proves reasonable," said I to Tom.

"They remind me," said he, "of prints I have seen in which a certain personage is depicted with horns and cloven hoofs."

"Oh! get out, Tom," I returned; "those poor brutes will teach you a lesson of patient endurance if you treat 'em right. Oxen have done great things for this country and poor settlers

who, like us, can't afford horses. You see," I continued, "they don't need oats, which we should have to buy for horses, until we have grown some—prairie grass and hay are sufficient; then their steady, slow pull is very suitable for breaking, and the risk of loss is much less; and finally, when you have done with them, you can eat them."

"If you want to, delicious," said he; "but I am learning."

Bob, as we had begun to call the owner of the oxen, now joined us, and remarked, "Well, you have seen what they can do; what do you think of them?"

"Depends on the price," said I.

"Well, now, I'll talk straight," he replied. "I brought them in to sell, and a butcher has offered me one hundred and eighty dollars cash, and I can't afford to let them go for less, and could get more on time, but I want the money, and if you will give me the same they are yours."

I looked at Tom, who nodded.

"About the harness?" said I.

"That goes with them," he replied, and added: "The black one is not as free as the other, and wants keeping up, but you will find them all right."

"Well, you seem to talk fair, and I guess we'll take them," said I; and so we came into posses-

sion of Joe and Nigger, as Bob told us he called them.

We now told him we thought of starting with an outfit to find homesteads, and he said it was a good idea, as we could take our time to choose, and added: "If you come our way, drop in, and we'll tell you what we can"; he also gave us some directions as to trails and roads.

"Are those sales advertised any good to us?" asked Tom.

"Yes," returned Bob; "you might pick up a wagon or plough. You see, we have had one or two bad harvests, and some poor fellows have fallen into the hands of the sheriff; however, I must go now and board the east-bound train to F——, and from there I must get a lift or hoof it for some twenty-five miles north. I'd like to go along with you, but we'll be busy on the land soon, and I can't stop."

Next day at the sale we became the proud possessors of a wagon, for which we paid fifty dollars, also a walking twelve-inch plough, which we got cheap for eight dollars, and the following morning, after loading up our trucks at the station and buying a tent, we hitched up our new team and started out. Following Bob's directions, we took the road running for many miles near the railroad. On the other side the

land sloped away down towards the great river Saskatchewan, and though we could not see much of it, we could see the banks rising into hills on the far side.

The morning was bright and clear, though with a biting wind, and there were still patches of snow lying about, for winter is slow to loose its grip on this great North land.

The country undulated a good bit, and immense areas were, or rather had been, under crop; there were still large spaces of prairie, with here and there willow and poplar bluffs, as the patches of wood are called. Sometimes the road dipped into hollows, where the mud seemed so deep and sticky that it appeared we must stick fast, but, following other wheel-tracks, we made detours, and, our load being light, the oxen dragged us through.

After a mile or two, I handed the lines to Tom, and, having had some experience in driving oxen, devoted myself to instructing that young man as the easier work. I carefully told him that if he wished them to go to the right he must shout "Gee"; if to the left, "Ha"; and that he must urge on Nigger, who was slow, without hurrying Joe, who walked fast. Sometimes we even got quite a good trot out of them, but, though this may be necessary on occasions, I must say it does not seem natural to the poor brutes.

HITTING THE TRAIL FOR A HOMESTEAD.

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About midday we unhitched the bulls and gave them a drink at a slough,[1] and sitting down under the shelter of a bluff, which kept off some of the biting wind, we made a hearty meal from a loaf and a tin of herrings, bought in a store at B—— before starting; the oxen, carefully tied to the wagon, grazed on the prairie meanwhile.

We had just finished our frugal lunch when Tom rose and went towards the oxen. Noticing that Joe had stopped grazing and was watching the young fellow's approach with big, wide-open eyes, I had just time to say "Be cautious," when the beast swung his great head, broke the line, and following this up with an unwieldy gambol and dragging Nigger by his nose-chain, they both trotted away due north. Tom, giving vent to a very unparliamentary expression, was on the point of following, when I checked him, and remarked, "Profanity is useless and wrong, and, besides, wastes breath. I didn't think such well broken bulls would play us this trick, but should have remembered that after all we are strangers to them."

We looked at one another for a moment or

[1] This term (pronounced "sloo") is used of a depression in the surface which may hold water or from which the water may have gone, leaving it marshy. Thus, if a crop of hay grows in the depression, it is spoken of as a "hay sloo."

two; then I said: "They are heading for that bluff; you are a pretty good sprinter: see if you can get round in front of them; but don't rush at them—try and get them to stand still. I will get up on the other side."

Off he went, and I followed, though not very hopefully, knowing the cunning ways of the apparently stupid genus *Bos*. But at this juncture I noticed a man with a wagon and team of horses coming along a trail which crossed our line of operations, and diverted my course to meet him. As I approached, I said: "Morning; would you do us the kindness of unhitching a horse and helping us catch those brutes?" pointing in the direction of the bulls, which were still pursuing the even tenor of their way. I felt pretty small, but a kindly smile slowly spread over the face of the man as he silently got off his wagon and, rapidly unhitching the near horse, sprang on its back, and we both proceeded towards the bulls, which Tom had by this time succeeded in bringing to a stand.

Coming up with them, the wagoner stood on one side while Tom stood on the other, and I was able to walk up quietly to their heads and get hold of the chain fastened to their nose-rings.

"Thank you very much," said I,

"You're welcome; been in the same fix many a time myself," said he, and went off to his wagon.

Silently we led our team back to our wagon, where, as we hitched up, I gave Tom his first lesson in that simple operation.

Once on our way again, I explained to my comrade that, taught by their experience on the ranches, oxen usually have a respect for a man on horseback which they seem to lack for one on foot. I also said, "We must buy a tethering-chain at the first opportunity, and also get some wire and fence in a small pasture on our homesteads, with a corral to enable us to easily keep and catch the bulls when wanted, as for want of these precautions settlers often lose a lot of valuable time hunting for and catching strayed oxen."

"Don't they hobble them?" asked Tom.

"Some do," said I; "but hobbles are not very efficient, and they are dangerous too, as an ox may break its leg if it gets in a boggy slough; and the same applies to tethering-chains."

Towards nightfall we arrived at the town of M——, and putting our team into the livery barn, repaired to the hotel, fortunately in time for supper, for meals are not often served outside the usual hours, and unless the town is a considerable one there is no restaurant.

The following morning, as our road would

now lie away from the railroad and stores, it became necessary to make a few more purchases, chief among them being an axe, cartridges—or shells, as they are called—a kettle and frying-pan; we also bought some pickled pork and bread, tea and sugar, flour and matches, and other small sundries. Leaving the town, we headed for a few miles due north, and were glad to observe at short intervals really substantial frame-houses and buildings on evidently prosperous farms; but I pointed out to Tom that the proximity to a railroad, provided the land is good, makes a marvellous difference. Towards midday we struck a cross-country trail which led us for several miles eastward, and we repeated the experiences of the previous day, except that a good tethering-chain saved us the ox chase.

Striking another north road, we turned in that direction, and soon came to what is called a "jog." The country being laid out on the chess-board plan, the surveyors are faced by the rotundity of the earth in running their roads north and south, and to get over this difficulty, on some east and west roads the north and south ones are cut and an angle made.

As the day drew to a close, we arrived at the house of Mr. and Mrs. S——, of whom Bob had told us. This was a good frame-building

of two stories, with a large living-room on the ground floor, and this worthy Yorkshire couple made a practice of putting up travellers and their teams. Some paid, some didn't—perhaps could not. The good woman, however, showed us with pride some beautiful gifts which had been presented to them on the occasion of their golden wedding, and which served to show that at least some of their guests appreciated their hosts' kindness.

The following morning was less fine, and there was a flurry of snow driving before the wind; but as we hoped it was the last of winter, and time was precious, we hitched up and made a start. We soon passed a new railroad grade which crossed our road, and a young man who joined us for a lift, and who evidently recognized the oxen, told us it ought to have been opened years ago, and that people were tired waiting for it. However, he thought it was only waiting now for the steel, which was good news. He also said he had been a Barnardo boy, was the proud possessor of a hundred and sixty acres of the soil now, but remarked that it had not been much use to him yet. He also told us that he worked for a Mr. G——, who, with his wife, lived on our line of route, that Mrs. G—— was a very kind woman, and would probably feed us if we

pushed on fast and got to their house by dinner-time.

The country continued rolling, though apparently gradually rising from the river valley. As we came to the top of the rises we could see our dark-brown road stretching before us in a straight line due north. But little of the land hereabout had been broken, and though the snow had now ceased, the sky was overcast, and the wide expanse of bleached prairie looked ghastly as the snow was rapidly leaving it. Here and there it was a little relieved by the dark, leafless willow bluffs, but it must be confessed the prospect was not inspiring at this season to our English eyes.

Now and then we passed a shack or house, but even the best of them looked little better than hovels to us, fresh from the English landscape. Still, as I pointed out to Tom, "we were at the beginning of things, as it were, and must let our imaginations picture the face of the country in a few years' time."

We had, however, in the course of our journey, passed one or two of the lumber-built, white-painted schoolhouses so familiar to the prairie-dweller, and now in the distance we saw a little church built in the same style, but with the addition of a square tower.

Near this lived our companion's boss, as he called his employer; and when we were introduced as prospective settlers, the kindly couple from the Old Country gave us a hearty welcome, and invited us to sit down to dinner with them.

Their lumber-built one-story dwelling, like many another, was sodded outside and on the roof with thick sods cut from the prairie by the plough. It gives a dwelling a hovel-like appearance, but we soon found it is a practice that adds greatly to the comfort of the occupants in keeping the interior warm in winter and cool in summer.

While Mrs. G—— urged us to make a hearty meal, her husband, who, we learned, was connected with the district council, kindly gave us some valuable information.

He told us that nearly all the alternate square miles were owned by the C.P. Railroad, and that, as in this case, it had come into their possession through another railroad they had taken over, they had to pay taxes on it like other settlers. He pointed out that this was a fairer arrangement than that existing in some other districts where land had been conceded to them.

He further told us that this great corporation was holding the land at prices ranging from

ten to seventeen dollars an acre, but it was rumoured they had a colonization scheme in prospect.

We also learned from him that the post office was about a mile and a half away, at the house of one of the earliest settlers, who had by perseverance and the hard work of himself and his wife "made good," as he put it, and after whom the post office was named. He also told us that a young Englishman with his aunt, a lady from Yorkshire, lived near the church, and there were many other settlers not far away.

On hearing from his young hired man, who sat down at table with us, that we had bought Bob's oxen, he told us that he and his cousins (for another had now joined them) lived only some three miles further north. He advised us to make for their house, saying they would put us up for the night, if at home.

Coming out of the house, our host pointed out that his place was on the top of a rise, and that, looking south, in clear weather they could see the hills on the other side of the Saskatchewan River, some fifty or sixty miles distant. He also showed us his well with some pride, telling us it was about eighty feet deep and gave an excellent supply of good water, and that, strangely enough, though they had bored to a far greater depth

within a hundred yards of this previously without success.

Pursuing our way, we noticed that about here more of the land had been broken up, and that as the snow melted large areas of stubble were left bare; and seeing a man seeding near a house on the left, we asked him where W——, of whom we had bought the oxen, lived. He said that if we went on a little further we should see four square holes with a post in the centre on the left of the road; that this marked the corner of a section, and that then, if we left it to the oxen, they would find the house for us. This proved true, for the bulls soon struck into a trail which led off the road, and we came in sight of a house perched on a hill, and drawing near, saw two young men busy near a large lumber stable. They stopped work as we came up, and one, a strongly built young fellow in blue jeans and a black cap, looking more at the oxen than us, said, "Joe and Nigger back again! Well, I did think I had seen the last of those brutes."

We were so nonplussed by such a reception that we did not know what reply to make, when his companion, a well-knit figure in light brown, with a large quantity of black hair and wearing a Stetson hat, said pleasantly:

"Don't mind—it's just his way; I guess you

are the fellows Bob told us of; jump down and unhitch, and come in."

They both helped us; Jim, though, was evidently a licensed joker, remarking:

"Yes, get 'em in the stable before the sight of 'em overpowers me and I faint."

We made our way to the house, where we found Bob, who introduced us to his cousins.

As we were destined to see more of this trio, I will add a few words of description to those already written. Bob, the oldest, hailed from a Lancashire town; he had, however, seen a good bit of Canada, and on one occasion worked his passage down the lakes in a grain steamer, and had crossed the Atlantic as a cattle man in a cattle boat—this last experience being one he did not wish to repeat.

Harry, the dark-haired and silent young man, was from Somerset, had been brought up on a farm, and, if somewhat reserved, was soon found to be exceedingly capable. He too had seen a good deal of Canadian life in the West, and was one of those to whom no sort of work seemed to come amiss.

Jim, as they called the jocular young fellow, came from Somerset also. He had seen something of farm-life in the Old Country, had only recently joined them, and evidently kept them lively.

LOCATED ON A HOMESTEAD.

To face p. 56.

Their house was a comfortable square log-building, divided into a large living-room and two cubicles. It had a big lean-to building around part of the front and one corner, and a capital cellar in which to store potatoes and other things in winter. They told us that this dwelling owed much to the abilities of Harry, who among other things was a good builder.

They explained that they had the working of a section which had been bought from the C.P. Railroad, and that each had entered for a homestead of his own. After supper, which consisted of fried pork and rice, washed down with tea and cream, for they had a cow, we showed them our list of homesteads open for entry.

They thought there were one or two well worth looking at, and Bob remarked that, as next day was Sunday, and they would not be at work on the land, he would go with us to have a look at them.

They hauled out some mattresses and rugs for us, and we slept soundly on the floor of their living-room, in company with their big brown dog—Ben, as they called him.

The next morning proved bright and fair, and after breakfast we were shown with some pride their stables and fine teams of horses, and we noticed that the land sloped down to a small

lake. It was more or less surrounded with dwarf willows and poplars, and had two small farmsteadings on the other or north side, while several other shacks were visible, and also a schoolhouse.

Remarking that we should be quicker with the buggy, Bob brought out a pony and hitched her up, saying she had brought him three colts in three years; and though that vehicle is only intended for two, Tom perched himself on my knees, and away we went.

"You have had some experience," said Bob, "and while I want to help you, I had rather not take the responsibility of advising any particular homestead. You see, it's not easy to say how a homestead will really turn out until you come to work it. I dare say you know that there is a plant that is said to indicate the presence of water, and another with a little white berry that shows the land is good where it grows; but, certainly, I should not like to give an opinion as to water. Then there is alkali; though I have not heard of it about here, there may be some under the sod in parts."

We were now fairly on the hunt for homesteads, and it certainly was interesting going to one square half-mile of land after another, with the prospect of owning one of them as a freehold,

and one began to wonder if some of the immigration were not due to a sort of hereditary land-hunger. I mean a sort of instinct, inherited from Saxon or other ancestors, to get hold of a bit of Mother Earth, there to have elbow-room and be able to develop ourselves and do our work, without cramping and artificial shackles. In fact, were not many actuated by a feeling that took little account of dollars and cents? And is not this a great factor in the subjugation of great new lands to man's use?

From some experience of many prairie-folks I am inclined to think that this is so, and that it is a factor receiving very unfair treatment from the dollar politicians, who for the most part rule Canada, and who in their way are worse than the Podsnaps and Gradgrinds from whom the Old Country is gradually shaking herself free.

Be this as it may, we found several of the homesteads we looked at too stony—not, be it understood, that the earth was shallow, but that large and small boulders, presumably brought by ice when the land lay at the bottom of the ocean, showed partly buried, and indicated the presence of others below the surface. This was specially the case on ridges, and meant they would have to be removed before the plough could be used with any satisfaction. Some quarter sec-

tions we saw had so much scrub willow and small bluff upon them that it was difficult to find room for a decent field between, and though this can, of course, be cleared, it is often more troublesome than stones, and if not properly done, the roots grow again. The settler does not want to begin by having to remove this stuff, as it is useless mostly, the larger trees having often been already cut by homesteaders for building shacks and stables and for firewood.

One quarter we looked at, fairly good in other respects, lay so much in a hollow that we feared it would be liable to those early frosts which may come in August, just as grain is ripening, and are apt to be terribly destructive. The early settler has to contend with many evils, but perhaps none more disheartening.

At length we came to a quarter section of which half was low-lying and bounded by hills to the south, and with a gradual slope to the north; quite half lay along a hillside sloping westward, and was very free from stones and scrub. It was by no means ideal for grain growing, but as we had thoughts of stock, we determined to investigate and consider it further.

Now began a hunt for the corners. It should be understood that when the country is surveyed and marked out by the Government surveyors,

they dig four holes some eighteen inches square about six feet distant from each other, and placed north, south, east and west of the corner point. At the north-east corner of each section they also leave an iron bar on which are cut certain marks. Now, as the country is plotted out in townships, as they are called, of six miles square, each numbered consecutively from south to north, and also numbered as ranges from east to west, and each square mile or section, as it is called, in a township is also numbered, a given one should be found with comparative ease—at least in theory; but the marked iron bars are apt to get removed—sometimes, it is said maliciously, by ranchers who do not want settlers. In places also the scrub grows over the marks and they become difficult to find. With Bob's help, however, we succeeded in locating the corners of this quarter, and also satisfied ourselves that there was still timber near at hand that would do for a log shack, fence-posts, and firewood.

The sun was now rapidly setting, but Bob's mustang pony, with her head once turned homeward, threading her way through scrub and between badger-holes and stones, from the two latter of which we got some bumping, soon brought us to her home.

As we drew up at the stable, the dog, who had been with us, bounded away to meet two figures advancing across the grey prairie.

"Bert and Fred," said Bob. "They are friends of ours who often come over on Sunday," and after introducing us we all went into the house, where a good meal was soon ready.

After doing justice to this, and lending a hand to clear away the wreck of it, pipes were lighted, and as we sat round the stove in the middle of the room, conversation became general.

We learnt that Bert, a very tall figure, after some experience of stock and share business in London, had spent some years in British Columbia, and finding the dollars far from plentiful there, had come to try his fortune on the prairie. Like our hosts, he had known English public-school life. Fred, a somewhat shorter but very strongly built man, hailed from Staffordshire, but had spent many years in the United States, and had had many interesting experiences before coming to the prairie.

The talk reviewed the Old land and the New, and, for our benefit, the prospects of this particular district; and then we had a gramophone recital, and Harry gave us one or two violin solos with excellent feeling. We learnt that both Bert and Fred played on instruments, but

had not brought them, but the latter sang "Mona" with such feeling that we were much impressed.

Commenting on this, after the departure of the two friends, Bob told us a sad story, which I will briefly relate, as, though not uncommon, it is characteristic of the troubles which often beset the settler, especially with a wife and family.

"About four years ago," said Bob, "Fred and his wife came into this district from New York; she was a very worthy woman, helping him in every way, and working very hard. They homesteaded in a pretty spot under a little hill, at the foot of which lay a nice little slough or lakelet, on which the wild ducks and their young were constantly to be seen swimming about. They had a small log-house, implements, and livestock—among the rest a fine black Angus cow, a splendid milker, which was a great pet. They were rapidly bringing some of the prairie under cultivation, and things looked promising for a happy future, when the wife's health failed. Fred got a doctor from the nearest town, twenty-eight miles away. He prescribed for her, and eventually told her husband that an operation might be necessary, and advised him to get a surgeon from B——, some forty miles away. The surgeon came, placed her under chloroform, and after examination said she must go into

hospital in Saskatoon. It was now the depth of winter, with the thermometer constantly far below zero. With the help of neighbours, however, Fred got a covered wagon, with a stove in it to mitigate the extreme cold, and so took his wife to the railroad, twenty-eight miles over the snow-covered trails. The hundred miles or so of railroad journey were got over somehow, the operation performed; but, alas! it was too late. The patient took the last long trail, and poor Fred returned to his lonely homestead a grief-stricken man, though the hospital doctor told him that could he have had the patient five days earlier he could have saved her life."

Silence fell on us for a time. Then Bob said: "If the triple alliance of bankers, manufacturers, and railroads, with their gang of dollar politicians, which does so much to get settlers out here, would do something more to conserve the health, especially that of the women and children who come, they would do a humane thing, and even be wise in their own interests."

The morning broke clear and bright, giving promise of fine weather, and our hosts were astir early, for at this season of the year men and beasts work very hard. We watched them hitch four horses abreast to the great seeder, and another similar team to the wide harrows,

and begin seeding on a stretch a mile long that had been prepared the fall before.

Hitching up our bulls, we started to renew our homestead explorations, and having learned from Bert and Fred that there were one or two quarters worth looking at in their part, which lay to the westward, we turned our faces in that direction.

We found the country much less covered with scrub than the part we had seen the previous day, and some of it was rolling downland. Having spent most of the morning in looking at one or two vacant quarters, but without being favourably impressed by them, we came about dinner-time to the house of a worthy Dane and his wife, who invited us into their comfortable shack and to a share of their midday meal. Our hosts, we found, could speak English well, and added to our store of useful information of the district, telling us that west of them were some Swedes, and further on some Russians, while to the north were some English and people from the States.

Starting out once more, we came in the course of the afternoon to a vacant quarter which seemed to deserve more careful consideration than those we had previously seen. From the top of a little rise, near the north line or border of this homestead, the view stretched away to

the hills beyond the Saskatchewan River. From where we stood the land fell with a short and slight declivity to a fairly level piece of ground, which comprised most of the quarter section in question. To the west and north-west it was bounded by low hills, and on further examination, we found that though there were some patches of scrub and stones on it, they were not very numerous.

As the top of the little rise was protected by a small willow bluff and had a small slough with water in behind it, we determined to pitch our tent there, spend the night, and generally consider the position of affairs.

While I tethered the bulls, Tom busied himself with lighting a fire.

"Watch that fire carefully, Tom," said I.

"You don't mean to say the prairie would burn now? Why, the snow has only just left it," he returned.

"Don't you build on that: this wind dries it very fast," I answered, and was walking towards him when a little gust swept round the corner of the bluff, carrying some sparks from the newly built fire away with it, and in an instant the prairie was ablaze in three or four places. Tearing off my overall jacket, and shouting to Tom to do the same, I rushed forward, and as

the wind was fortunately blowing away from the longer grass and dried leaves of the bluff, together we succeeded in beating out the fires.

"I shouldn't have thought it," said Tom, as we looked at each other.

"No, you wouldn't," I returned, and added: "But we both know now, and have come pretty near signalizing our arrival by a catastrophe to the district."

Warned by this little experience, we carefully chopped out a good-sized hole in the sod with the axe, under the lee of the tent, and made a little fire there, while I explained to Tom that not only were heavy fines supposed to be levied on any one starting a prairie fire, but elaborate precautions laid down for their prevention, which last were, however, as in our case, often ignored.

The wind had now stopped, and the dew began to fall, as usually happens in the evening. This lessens the danger of fire, and our kettle was soon boiling, and some pork hissing in the frying-pan, and, as we comfortably enjoyed our evening meal, we discussed the homestead question.

"I rather like this spot," remarked Tom; "it seems a nice place to build a palatial residence on some day."

"That's all right," I returned, "but of more importance, if you think of grain growing, is the fact that the quarter lies with a nice southern slope, and somewhat protected from cold winds, and yet not in a hollow, which is liable to catch the frost, and that the soil seems a nice rich chocolate mould. You see," I went on, "though I think there are some advantages about a north slope, especially in a dry, hot season, yet on the whole I think the south side is the best, mainly because, the seasons being short and the danger of frost great, it is very important that the seed should germinate, grow, and mature quickly."

"What about the one we saw yesterday?" said Tom.

"My idea of that one," said I, "is that it is not a bad one for stock raising, and as I favour that line, and you are keen on grain, especially wheat, how would it do if you take this, and I that one?"

"Sounds all right," answered Tom; "but is it not a nuisance they are some five miles apart?"

"In a way, yes," I replied, "though it splits the risk of hail and fire, and you see it is not easy to get suitable quarters near together; further, there are ways of arranging to live and work more or less together, which we must think and talk over later."

"Carried unanimously," said my comrade, who, my readers will have discovered by now, was a man of few words, though he quickly added: "What's the next move?"

"Why," said I, "we must hit the trail the first thing in the morning on our road to enter for our respective quarter sections, lest we are forestalled."

And so we located our homesteads.

CHAPTER III

BREAKING THE PRAIRIE

THE next morning broke bright and fair, with a feeling of spring in the air, and the great white clouds which rose in battalions from the south-western horizon sailed majestically across the blue above us, while their shadows trailed across the bleached, rolling expanse below.

Hitting a trail which led into the straight road near Mr. G——'s house, we left our loose goods under his care.

Thence proceeding, mounted on the seat of the empty wagon, we talked.

"Been pretty fortunate in finding homesteads, haven't we?" said my comrade.

"Yes," I returned; "it might have been a much longer job."

"How do you suggest we put in our residence duties of six months each year and live together?" Tom asked.

"Speaking generally," I answered, "I propose that, my homestead being near wood and

a deep slough that won't freeze solid, we make our winter residence there, and as we shall have a lot of work to do on yours, that is the place for the summer. We may, however, want to work out at times, and in such cases the conditions are a bit relaxed."

"I see," returned my companion; "would you start right in on mine?"

"No," I answered; "there are but few stones on part of the other; the frost has now left the surface and it is moist, so I fancy breaking will go fairly well, and you might start right in with the bulls, while I fell some timber for a shack, which will save lumber. A fortnight there should do a lot; then we will move on to yours and start on those stones. We can get a lot of them out if it is a bit dry for breaking, and rains may come later."

"Right oh!" said Tom.

Arrived at the little town of F——, our nearest railroad point, we put the bulls up at the livery barn, and taking the train to B——, paid our ten dollars each and made successful entry for our homesteads.

A couple of days later found us back on my quarter section, ready to begin work in earnest. We had brought out with us a set of discs, a stove, crowbar, bucksaw, some wire for a small

pasture, also a pickaxe, shovel, nails of various sizes, some rope and lumber, besides a supply of flour, pork, groceries, etc. These, with our goods which we picked up at Mr. G——'s, made a very fair load.

In town we had seen a man with a starved-looking pony, which he told us he must get rid of, as he was leaving that part; she was what is known as a "shaganappy," or Indian pony, but such sometimes are of the mustang type and have good blood in them. It may be that they have sprung from Spanish stock that has in the course of centuries worked northward. Anyway, though in a wretched state, it seemed possible she was in foal, and we agreed to give the man fifty dollars for her, and brought her with us tied behind the wagon. Her colour was buckskin, and as her late owner said he called her Nancy, she went by that name with us.

As we should have to live in the tent for some time, it was set up with care in a sheltered spot, a hole being cut in the canvas for the stove-pipe to pass through.

A few armfuls of hay from a haystack not far off and our rugs provided us with bedding; water we got from the neighbouring slough, and as it was, of course, boiled for tea and in cooking, it was pretty safe. As cattle drink from holes

BREAKING THE PRAIRIE.

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in the ice in the winter and round the edges in the summer, the sloughs are apt to get impure.

Our bed and board might be rough, but our hearts beat high with hope as we started out to cut our first furrow in the primeval sod.

The day was glorious and the air exhilarating, and surely it was allowable if we felt a bit uplifted at what we were about to do.

Probably for many thousands of years Indians, buffalo, deer, and numerous wild animals had ranged freely over the land we were about to prepare for the sowing of grain, the harvest from which might find its way to help feed Europe's millions.

We also had the hope before us of being real freeholders in some three years, if all went well. True, there was not much time for such thoughts, but there was a real pleasure in marking out a field nearly half a mile long, with a sense of ownership.

It was fine, too, as we started the first furrow, to see the great black sod fall away from the mould-board as the sharp share cut through the strong grass roots.

Having had some practice, I held the plough for the first round; and though an English ploughman would have found ample cause for merriment, as he viewed our line of furrow, it must

be remembered that it is not easy to drive oxen straight, and that the important thing in breaking is to lay the sods flat and even.

Leaving Tom to do his best, I took the axe and went to some neighbouring bluffs in search of fence-posts for our pasture and corral.

I was fortunate in finding some willow-trees, whose wood is more lasting than poplar, and was soon busy cutting them into lengths of some seven to eight feet.

They are often rough and a bit crooked, but after being pointed and driven into a hole made with a bar, they answer the purpose very well for a time.

They are placed some six yards apart, and generally driven by standing in the wagon, and if the ground happens to be hard, the work is made easier by pouring water into the holes.

Once the posts are in, it is a simple matter to stretch lines of barbed or other wire along them.

With some help from Tom and the team, the pasture was completed in three days, one part touching a bit of marshy ground where there was water, while one corner was narrowed and the fence strengthened to form a corral, into which the animals could be driven if necessary.

Tom was making a pretty good show with the

breaking, considering that he was new to the work, but his voice was nearly gone at the end of the day with shouting at the bulls, and he was very glad to stretch his tired limbs on his hay couch when night came. He was, however, very plucky, and cheered up when told he was doing well and breaking more than an acre a day.

One day Bob came riding by, and stopped to take a look at what we were doing.

"You're making a good start," said he, "but I tell you what it is: you would do a lot better with a bit more power, and we have an ox we are not using just now—Mike, we call him; you're welcome to his help."

We thanked him, and he went on:

"I shall be passing again to-morrow and will bring Mike, and you hitch him on outside Joe, who can keep to the furrow, as he is the one for that."

Bob proved as good as his word, and thenceforward Tom was able to make much better progress.

One day I started out with the axe in search of some suitable timber for a shack and stable, which I was fortunate enough to find among several bluffs about a mile and a half to the eastward.

Some were on railroad land and others on homesteads not yet entered for; but the new settler needing logs is not particular in such cases, and rightly so, as his requirements are urgent, and there is danger of destruction by fire until the country is more thickly settled.

It is, however, cause for regret that so much wood has had to be cleared, as it leaves the country very bare, and even when the busy homesteaders find time and means to start fresh plantations, years must elapse before they mature.

The trees I found were mostly white and black poplar, from which I was able to cut logs twelve to fourteen feet long and averaging eight inches in diameter.

Most settlers either can, or soon learn to, handle an axe with more or less skill, but it needs much experience and practice to acquire the dexterity of the real lumber-Jack.

We had been employed at our respective jobs for some days, and were just entering the tent for supper one evening, when a man appeared carrying a small sack over his shoulder. He spoke with a French accent, and said his name was Pierre, that he had a homestead near, and had dropped in to give us a call. We asked him to join us at supper, and as Tom could talk some French, the two were soon chattering away,

until they stopped with a look of surprise and stared at me.

"What's up?" said I, when Pierre asked, in very good English:

"Didn't you know it was Sunday?"

We all had a laugh, for so things happen in the stress of work. However, we agreed to have a rest the next day, for experience had taught me it is a mistake to keep labouring on without a break.

The Canadian law, too, prescribes the observance of the Sabbath, and wisely, for without it, especially under the conditions that prevail, life is apt to become far too material.

When our visitor said good-night and was departing, we reminded him of his sack, but he walked off, shouting back, "That's for you."

On examination, we found the present consisted of a nice lot of potatoes, carrots, etc., and very welcome they were.

The next morning Tom took a stroll with the gun to see if he could find something to vary our monotonous diet. He returned in a couple of hours with two nice ducks he had secured with one shot, though he had to crawl very cautiously through the dwarf willows and long grass round the slough before firing, then wait till they drifted near the shore, and wade in to get the birds.

The whole proceeding is not in accordance with the game laws, but when food is scarce, settlers are not very particular as to their strict observance.

A few days more and I figured I had felled and prepared enough logs for a shack and stable, and a rough measurement of the breaking showed that Tom and the bulls had succeeded in turning over nearly twenty acres.

This was encouraging, and I took a turn with the discs and gave my comrade a rest.

The sods lay flat and even, about four inches in thickness, but Tom's work was not quite equal to some beautiful breaking our Danish friend had shown us, which his wife had done.

The discs are a set of circular knives about twelve inches in diameter, which cut up the tough sods as they revolve.

On the whole we had got on pretty well in our tent, but just as we were preparing to break camp, we had a strong southerly wind. The surface of the breaking had dried with the sun, and as the discs went to and fro, the wind blew large quantities of the fine dust into our tent, which was to leeward, covering our bedding and getting into our food.

This literally gave us a taste of the land we had come to; but as our work here was finished for the time, we struck our tent, and loading

it and our other belongings on the wagon, and tying Nancy behind, we started for Tom's homestead.

The weather for the past few days had been beautiful; and as we rode, sitting on the high spring seat of the wagon, we had an opportunity of noting the changing aspect of the countryside. A green shade was creeping over the bleached prairie. The buds on the trees in the black willow and poplar bluffs were bursting, while, as we passed the land we had seen Bob and his cousins seeding, we noticed that the black earth was nearly hidden by the green, springing wheat.

This was the case with many other patches that had but a very few days before been in dark contrast to the prevailing colour.

Animal life, too, was more in evidence, and Tom tried to stalk a fine jack-rabbit, as the northern hare is called. He would have supplied us with fresh meat for several meals, but was too cute to stay within range of a shot-gun, and as we had no rifle, he went off with long, bounding leaps.

The pretty little squirrel-like gophers were amusing, retiring into their holes at our approach, but, prompted by curiosity, soon popping up again for another look.

In places the prairie is honeycombed with badger-holes, making travelling at times troublesome for man and beast, and there must be immense numbers of these animals, though their appearance on the surface is not very common.

Passing a sheltered, sunny spot, a grey, shaggy coyote, who appeared to be having a morning nap, uncoiled himself and loped off into a bluff. These sneaking prairie wolves, which prey on the farmer's poultry and may even kill a small calf, never seem to attack humanity, and small children go safely to and from school. These coyotes appear to get curiously mixed up with the dogs of the district, and Bob told us that their dog Ben, being decoyed off by a lady friend (herself apparently part wolf), went among the outlaws, as they surmised, and for the time his nature seemed quite changed. The owner of the other dog told them to shoot her, which they did, when Ben settled down again; but later on, being out with Bob and meeting some coyotes, Ben seemed to fraternize with them instead of being torn to pieces, as his master feared might have been the case.

We pitched our tent on the same spot it had occupied on our first visit to Tom's homestead, and having brought with us a supply of fence-

DOUKHOBOR AND HIS TEAM.

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posts, proceeded to make a small pasture which could be enlarged later on as required.

We chose a stony patch of land not very suitable for breaking, and ran one corner down to include a small slough in which was water. Having finished this job, we began the arduous work of "stoning." It is a task the homesteader hates, and we appreciated the remark of a neighbour to the effect that he "would hire a big Doukhobor with a strong back and weak head for it." Not very complimentary to these worthy folk, whose peculiar methods and sentiments may in a few years result in great benefit to the Dominion.

Be that as it may, we found plenty of need for brains as well as hands in "stoning." We constructed a small sledge, called a stone-boat, with two logs about five feet long held together by a platform of strong boards, three feet wide, nailed on the top.

To the front we secured a sort of wire lashing many folds thick, to hitch on the team. A few of the stones were lying so loosely on the surface of the ground that we soon got a couple of loads, which we hauled off and dumped in a heap, clear of any land we intended to break.

We found, however, that the majority of the stones were so deeply imbedded in the ground

that the best way was to leave the team in the pasture and proceed to dig them out.

Many smaller ones came out with a few blows of the pick, while it was necessary to dig deep round large numbers, and then lift them out by means of a bar and a wooden lever. Others again were so large and deeply imbedded that we left them to be dragged out later by the team and a chain, or buried deep below the reach of the plough in a large hole dug for the purpose.

After two days' hard work we estimated that we had fairly cleared three acres, having got out and hauled off twenty loads, though we knew some remained just out of sight below the surface.

We wanted to clear and prepare for seeding thirty acres this season, and the prospect did not look encouraging, as time was getting on. However, when the day's work was finished, and we had enjoyed our evening meal, and stretched our tired frames on our hay couch, things did not look too bad, especially as we reminded ourselves that we had worked on the worst patch, and in parts the stones were much less numerous.

The mornings, too, were usually glorious, and as we turned to, we realized that we were becoming inured to hard toil and more proficient at our work.

In a week we had fairly cleared a strip some thirty yards, the width of the homestead, viz. half a mile. It ran east and west, and on it we decided to start breaking, taking turns at the plough, and digging out stones to widen the strip.

We still had the loan of Mike, and were able to turn over the sod, though the surface of the land was getting dry and the grass growing rapidly, its roots going deep to find the moisture as the subsoil thaws out.

We were, however, getting somewhat tired of tent-life, and as the dry weather continued, we decided that I should make a trip to town for a load of lumber to build a shack, leaving Tom to work away at the stoning.

Good timber was much less plentiful here than near my homestead, and on the whole a lumber building was much more easily put up and more satisfactory, though the material cost more. The trip, however, had little of incident, and three days saw me back.

Soon after starting out on my way to town, I had heard the coughing of a gasolene engine, and found Lars, a Swede and neighbour of ours, ploughing with it. We had some talk, in the course of which he said he would do some breaking for us, if we liked, for three and a half dollars

an acre. Tom and I discussed the proposition carefully; we had already broken about fifteen acres on Tom's homestead, and if we could get thirty-five more broken we should have a nice field. It would certainly make a hole in our remaining capital, but the idea was very tempting, and at length we decided that if Lars would do it for three and a quarter dollars an acre we would let him.

So we put the proposition to our neighbour, and he accepting, we returned Mike to his owner with many thanks.

We decided now to put in two or three days building the shack, and as a preliminary to fireguard the site, including the little bluff, and all our belongings.

For this purpose we ploughed half a dozen furrows all round, and leaving an intervening space equal in width to the furrows, ploughed the same number of furrows outside, and finally burnt off the intervening grass carefully. This is practically the regulation fireguard, and for lack of it many a settler has been burnt out.

We were both fair amateur carpenters, and having taken notice how neighbouring shacks were put together, had no great difficulty in constructing a frame together and covering it with board.

True, it only had an earth floor, but with a rough table and bedsteads which we knocked together, it seemed to us a little palace in comparison with the tent.

The toil of stoning now went steadily on, but we had become inured to the work; besides, June had come and the weather was glorious: flowers were springing all over the prairie, the dwarf rose-bushes were bursting into bud, buffalo birds hopped around us and sometimes perched on the backs of the oxen, while the willow and poplar bluffs were showing beautifully green.

We turned out early in the brilliant mornings, and having made a hearty breakfast, were often wading through the deep, dew-spangled grass by six o'clock.

As the day advanced we found the sun very hot and took a long rest in the middle, working away again as the evening grew cool.

The water in the slough near was now drying up, and we had to go to a deeper one with a bucket for our supply, and drive the oxen there morning and evening for theirs.

But a change was imminent; the weather grew sultry, and a neighbour who owned a thermometer told us that on several days it had stood as high as ninety degrees in the shade.

Suddenly, one afternoon, dark clouds collected

along the western horizon, and apparently advancing against our prairie wind, culminated in a terrific thunderstorm.

Many thunderstorms have I witnessed in different parts of the world, but none more imposing than those which from time to time expend their fury on the prairies of the North American Continent. As we sat in our little shack, the flicker of the lightning seemed almost continuous, while as the storm rolled nearer and nearer, the recurring crashes of thunder were awful as they pealed out just over our heads and the echoes rolled from cloud to cloud. We distinctly saw one flash of lightning fire the grass, and as a cold blast of wind had now set in from the west, the fire began to spread rapidly. It was, however, soon stopped by a tremendous downpour of rain.

Scattered as the population is, there is no denying the fact that accidents frequently occur from lightning, and a widow woman who ranched in our neighbourhood had a few years before lost her husband in this way.

The sense of comparative isolation in a vast open country adds to the sublime grandeur of such spectacles, and the man or woman must surely lack imagination who would not confess to a feeling of solemn awe during such convulsions of nature.

Nor is the lightning the only cause of anxiety. Heavy rain usually accompanies these storms, and is often very welcome, as in our case; but instead of this, there sometimes comes the dreaded hail, ruining hundreds of acres of promising crops. The stones which fall are positively dangerous, and I have seen a building with the paint partly chipped off by them; at such times horses are apt to become uncontrollable, and if harnessed, the best course is to unhitch them if possible, and seek shelter for oneself under the wagon.

There may be parts of the earth where such storms are worse (Darwin, in "The Voyage of the *Beagle*," tells of good-sized animals being killed in South America), but a heavy prairie hailstorm seems bad enough.

Lightning-conductors are of course often fitted, but the average homesteader is so busy, and has so many demands on his pocket, that the practice is not very common.

But even the lightning has its humorous side for the hardy, hopeful prairie-folk, one professedly serious account telling how the lightning struck a shack, rendering the baby unconscious for a time, and then made its way out through the keyhole, ruining the lock, and adding that when the door was opened the dog was so terrified he bolted out and was never seen again.

Thunderstorms like these generally begin by the massing of clouds in the north and west towards midday, and gradually work in a south-easterly direction, following the course of the river, apparently. This is of some interest, as certain districts appear to be much more liable to hail than others, and while but little damage was done on this occasion near us, a huge acreage of crop nearer the river was destroyed. Such damage may be insured against, but, as with the lightning-conductors, it is not very general to take this precaution.

The weather had now become much cooler, and in the fine intervals we worked at the stones, which came out of the ground much more easily, while during the storms we sat in our shack and congratulated ourselves that we had built it in time. True, there were a few drippings from the roof, and we resolved to cover this with rubberoid roofing, to be bought in town on our next visit.

Gradually the weather cleared up, and one fine morning, as we were hard at work, Tom suddenly stopped, remarking:

"Listen, what's that?"

We both stood at attention, and soon the usual sound made by a gas engine was plainly audible.

"Good, here comes Lars," said I, and we both started off to meet the great lumbering machine and pilot its driver clear of the soft, boggy places. These heavy engines can usually travel over the prairie if they keep to the harder ground, but if they get bogged in a hollow after heavy rain, long delay may ensue.

In ploughing and breaking, the go-ahead West presses gasolene, i.e. petrol, into its service, besides horses, ponies, and oxen, and even, on some occasions, a cow. The use of power for this purpose is intimately connected with threshing, and from the settler's point of view I hope to refer to it in a later chapter.

We felt it was a financial plunge for us, with our limited capital; but after the slow work with the bulls it was great to watch the five fourteen-inch ploughs, dragged by the twenty-five-horse engine, turning over the rich chocolate earth, the work going pretty well now, after the rain.

There were still stones here and there just below the surface, and it was needful for one to stand on the wooden platform and handle the levers which raise each plough separately if needed, and Tom undertook this.

The engine travelled at a fast walking pace, and the width of dark earth rapidly widened. Delays, however, often occurred, the ploughs

being each fitted with a stout wooden plug, which in theory is supposed to break if the share happens to strike a formidable obstacle. When this happens, it is of course necessary to stop, remove the broken remains, and put in a new plug.

After such little stops the share sometimes travels some distance on the surface before re-entering the ground, leaving unploughed patches. The shares, too, want sharpening from time to time, and as a forge may be anything from half a mile to five miles off, this takes time, to say nothing of engine breakdowns, which may render a journey to town needful.

However, about a week sufficed to finish our thirty-five acres, and it was pleasant to have the company of Lars. He entertained us in the evenings with experiences of his old home in Europe, and especially with an account of a trip he had made to the Klondyke in search of gold, of which he got but little.

Misled by reports of the advantages of the route through Edmonton and the North-West, they set out from that city with horses, some of which they finally ate. They built boats and made sails for navigating the rivers, lived in a tent during the winter, feeding mostly on game they secured, reaching their destination after

STARTING TO FETCH THE MAIL.

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some two years of wilderness travel, and making something out of a good stock of valuable furs. But such experiences are not uncommon in the Great Lone Land.

One of us usually went once a week for the mail, taking any letters we had for post at the same time. We had been in the habit of riding Nancy, but as we were expecting a foal soon from her, we had given up riding her, and so had to walk, and as the distance was four miles, it took quite a little of our valuable time.

The mail is, however, an important element in the settler's life, as by this means he keeps in touch with the great world. Letters and parcels arrived and were despatched from K—— twice weekly, and it was interesting, if one happened to be there about the time of the mailman's arrival, to see folk from the surrounding district waiting patiently for the sorting of the often voluminous mail matter, which includes all newspapers that reach the district.

CHAPTER IV

HAY-TIME

We were now well into July, and haying-time was approaching.

"How are we to put up fodder for the winter?" said Tom, adding: "We have neither mowing machine nor rake, and I don't see how we can afford to buy them."

"We shall not want a lot," I returned, adding: "Our services should be valuable to some of our neighbours who have the tools and want a lot of hay put up, and I guess we may make a mutual arrangement; and we still have this fifty acres to cut up with the discs, and perhaps we can also get some help with that, in return for our help in haying."

"Good proposition, if we can work it," replied my comrade.

"Well," said I, "suppose I go and see Bob and his friends about it?"

"Go ahead and try it," said Tom.

Next morning I started out in pursuance of

this design, and found the three cousins as usual very pleased to see me. I told them how we were fixed, and we soon formed a plan of action. They pointed out that there were yet some ten days before they would begin cutting, during which they could spare a team, and one of them would go over with their discs and work on our breaking. They would also lend us Mike again, to strengthen our ox team. This was excellent, and the handy, quiet Harry asked if we had any lumber left over from our shack—Tom's shack; and finding we had a few boards, suggested that perhaps they could find a few more about, and, with the aid of some poles, make a hay-rack for our wagon, thus giving us two wagons for the work. They would also go with their mower and rake to my homestead, and help us to put up as much hay as we wanted for the winter.

In return we undertook to work with them during the hay-time, and as they had many animals which would need much hay, this might mean two or three weeks' work, or more, if the weather were not good.

Leading Mike, I set out on my return to Tom's homestead in good spirits.

Following the recent rains the prairie was now gay with flowers—harebells, great daisies, and what the prairie-folk call "brown-eyed Susans,"

like dwarf sunflowers, besides roses—crimson, cream, and white; also, in one place, a few tiger-lilies.

I noticed on passing some pieces of wheat that it was just coming into ear. I also gathered quite a quantity of mushrooms to add to our simple fare, but as evening approached both Mike and I became unpleasantly aware of one of the greatest plagues of prairie-life. The mosquitoes had appeared some weeks before, but were getting worse as the season advanced, and in places we seemed walking through clouds of them. A sweep of the hand over the poor animal's side to brush them off left it covered with blood, but what was the use of destroying a few dozens out of billions ?

The waving of a willow spray in front of my own face helped a bit, for a time; even smoking seemed useless, and at last we both trudged on in acute misery.

A lovely summer evening when the wind has fallen seems the chosen hour for these hateful pests to sally forth in myriads, and their voracious attacks on the belated traveller appear truly diabolic. An immense amount of profanity, bad temper, and even serious accidents with teams, are probably due to this cause.

Tom met me at the pasture gate with the remark :

"These Canadian humming-birds are awful to-night; look at those poor brutes," and he nodded towards Nancy and the bulls, who were evidently in too great distress to feed.

"Why don't you light a smudge?" said I.

"What do I know about a smudge?—and I am afraid of fire," replied my comrade.

"Oh, you can find a bare spot, and anyway, the prairie won't burn now—there's too much dew," said I.

We soon found some dead twigs and grass and got a good blaze started, and then, heaping on it a quantity of damp grass and manure, a thick blue smoke drifted away before the gentle breeze. In the shelter of this the poor animals found relief. A "smudge," as it is called, seems the one effective outdoor panacea for the mosquito plague, but even this is not of much use if there is no wind and the smoke goes straight up.

For ourselves, we rushed to the shack, made a smoke inside, and closed the door on our tormentors. Of course, one should have wire blinds, but that is a luxury often absent for the beginner.

Next day came Jim with a team of horses and a set of discs, and as Tom had already made a start with the bulls, work on the fifty acres got on well.

Harry appeared on the scene later with some tools, and he and I started to build a hay-rack.

This implement is of great use to the prairie farmer, who, unlike the English harvester, often has to work alone and cannot load a wagon and tie it on.

We first lifted off the wagon-box, and having succeeded in finding two suitable poplars for the main beams, fitted smaller pieces across, and then some corner posts, and so began to form the structure, one side of which was to open outwards to help in unloading.

They are better built entirely of lumber, but the pioneer has to use what comes to hand, and Harry being a first-class all-round workman, we eventually put together a very serviceable rack.

A few days' steady work sufficed to finish the discing, and we set out for No. 9, as we called our friends' place.

Hay-time usually commences about the middle of July—in fact, there is an understanding, if not an actual law, that no one should begin to cut prior to that date. This is wise, because in the early stages of settlement, when much of the land is still unoccupied, there is often keen competition for the best grass, or at least that most suitable for hay.

This grows usually in the sloughs, and when

A HAY RACK.

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a settler has begun to cut such a place, he looks on it as secure for the season.

The "prairie-wool," as the grass on the higher parts is called, is probably more nutritious, but of course requires much more labour to put up an equal quantity.

Our friends were fortunate in having a fine slough on their own place, a depression some fifteen acres in extent, nearly round, with a fringe of willows. Here Bob had begun cutting a couple of days previously, and some was now dry enough for Jim to follow with the horse-rake; and Tom went down to help put it in cocks, while Harry and I finished off the rack for our wagon and got theirs ready.

In consequence of the dryness of the climate, the hay usually requires little of that laborious making so common in Britain; but it must not be supposed the weather is always to be depended on, and quantities of grass are often cut and never stacked.

Owing to the value and scarcity of labour, farmers and ranchers have contrived various expedients for getting the hay together, with more or less success.

One such plan, where a stack is put up on the spot, is what is known as sweeping it. A beam of wood some twenty feet long, with a team of

horses or bulls harnessed to each end, is used, and when it works well, will draw huge heaps together ready to be put up into a stack.

Another method which we found more serviceable, as far as unloading the rack went, was to roll the load off by an arrangement known to sailors as a parbuckle. Two ends of a strong rope are secured to the upper rail of the gate side of the rack, and the bight laid across the bottom and allowed to hang over the other side, so that the hay is loaded on the rope. On arrival at the stack, the gate of the rack is opened against the stack, the team unhitched from the wagon and, by means of a logging chain or rope, hitched on to the bight of the parbuckle, and the load rolled off.

By this means rows of loads can be placed close together, another tier on the top, and finally, a third load to top off with. When the plan works well it certainly saves much labour, but stacks made in this way seem more liable to let the wet in.

Thatching as in Britain is very unusual, nor, as far as the winter is concerned, is it needful; but when there is heavy rain in the fall, much hay may be damaged unless stacks are carefully topped off.

The ambition of the farmer is to build a proper barn, a huge structure, with room for horses

and cattle below, and ample loft for fodder above, with a windmill or small engine for drawing water supply. Such structures are common in the more settled districts, but quite usually beyond the reach of the first homesteaders. These barns can be fitted with various labour-saving appliances.

Where hay is put up in large quantities for the market, special machinery is often used, which would probably be a revelation to many a British farmer suffering from the dearth of agricultural labour, as indeed would the high wages paid.

On the other hand, it is often a pathetic, if inspiring, sight to see a homesteader alone, or assisted only by his wife or young son, putting up many tons of hay.

However, in our case the work went on rapidly. The centre of the big slough proving too damp to bear the weight of the team, Bob went on cutting the thickest of the prairie-wool round the outside, while the other four of us worked away.

One morning, as Harry and I were thus busy at the stack unloading, we noticed Bob hastily unhitching his horses. Tom and Sunny Jim too had left the bulls (who were swinging their heads about more than usual), and were hastening towards the house.

"What's up now?" said I.

We stood looking for a few seconds, and then became conscious of a pricking sensation about our necks and a swarm of insects.

"Flying ants," said Harry, adding, "Unhitch the team quick—we can't stand this."

We soon had the horses in the stable and hurried to the house, where, as the others arrived, a scene of confusion ensued as we stripped off our shirts and rubbed one another's backs with oil to allay the painful irritation.

Happily, these pests, though trying for the time, unlike the mosquitoes, don't last long, as they quickly pass the flying stage of their life, drop their wings, and return to earth, so we were soon at work again.

In the course of a fortnight we put up about forty to fifty tons, which our friends considered enough for the winter, three to every head being thought a fair estimate.

While we were finishing, Bob spent a couple of days cutting in a slough adjacent to my homestead. As there was no accommodation for man or beast there except the little pasture, he returned each evening.

Then we all went over for a few hours during two days and put up abundance of fodder for our wants, so by this bit of co-operation the haying was got through well.

The grasses are of various sorts. Among the rest, one with a pleasant peppermint smell is very common, which forms some slight offset to the attacks of the mosquitoes. The latter are not so bad while haying if, as is often the case, there happen to be a bright sun and fresh breeze.

One beautiful grass known as foxtail, which often grows in waving masses, is best avoided as bad for animals.

While on this subject, the spear grass too may be mentioned: it has a barbed point, and is liable to work its way through clothing and even deep into the flesh.

CHAPTER V

THE SCHOOL, WELL-DIGGING, AND A PICNIC

ONE Sunday during hay-time, Bert and Fred came in, and the latter and Bob were subjected to some good-humoured chaff about a new school they were trying to set going.

It seemed that Fred, who, it will be remembered, had lost his brave and noble-minded wife, was with one or two others impressed with the fact that a school was much needed in his district, which also contained Bob's homestead. So, forming themselves into school trustees, under the Government Act, with Fred as chairman, they had prevailed on the idealistic Bob to act as secretary-treasurer.

To this office there was attached an annual salary of fifty dollars, but he had already put in some hundreds of dollars' worth of time, and, in fact, all concerned had thus far worked hard without much definite result beyond the holding of many meetings and recording of many minutes.

How had this come about? Well, a site

had to be chosen and approved by the district council. This was found to be unsuitable, owing to the incompetence of the district council delegates, and the work had to be redone.

Then a contractor who undertook the job backed out, and a firm that promised to find the money on the bond issue took so long in doing it that the district member of the Provincial Legislature had to be appealed to.

There was some doubt, too, as to the number of children being sufficient to meet the requirements of the Act.

Under all these difficulties, the trustees and their secretary-treasurer had stuck to their work, and the scheme had now arrived at the stage of requiring a well.

A good well and a barn are the ambition of the pioneer settler, but in the early stage (unless it happens that water is near enough to the surface to reach by digging) it is usually beyond his reach, the cost by a professional well-digger with a boring machine being about one dollar per foot.

Under these circumstances, a good well at the schoolhouse is of course a great boon to the neighbours.

The outfit had arrived at the site a day or so previously, and we all set out to see how they were getting on.

The apparatus consists of a derrick some thirty feet high, fitted with machinery for lowering the rods, at the end of which is a bucket of very strong make, and at the end of this is a boring tool. This is driven by a horse gear, the team walking round and round in the familiar style. The machinery is so arranged that the team can withdraw the bucket when full, and also so that rods may be added as the well deepens.

By an ingenious plan a wooden crib formed of ten-feet lengths, or thereabout, of narrow planking held together by wire is put down to support the sides.

Stones, often very large ones, are constantly met with, making it needful to descend and put in a blast, and the whole well-digging business is a somewhat hazardous undertaking.

They stopped work for a minute or two as we all drove up, and Billy, the well-borer, explained that they had reached a depth of sixty feet but found little water. The clay, however, was coming up wet, and he was hopeful of getting through the bed of that material soon.

His boy started the well-trained white team on again, and we strolled round the site and held a sort of informal committee meeting.

In this we were joined by Thompson, a settler from far New Zealand, and also one of the trustees,

and even we outsiders caught some of the enthusiasm that filled the public-spirited trustees and their secretary-treasurer.

A shout from Billy recalled us to the well. "She's going through, boys," said he, and the bucket rose dripping. "Five feet and rising fast," said Billy. There was a murmur of satisfaction, for all knew the boring tool had gone through the clay bed and released the water below.

Once more the bucket came up, and the wet rod told us there was now about eight feet of water in the new well, so it was arranged to continue another fifteen feet, if possible, to ensure a good supply, and stop at that.

There was to be a picnic near the site of the new school in a day or two, and our friends invited us to put up with them and lend a hand till it was over, and as there was nothing more to be done on Tom's homestead just now, we decided to do so.

We had brought Nancy, and so had all our animals with us. We had her tethered near the house, and one morning were delighted to find a beautiful little foal standing by her side. Fortunately, all had gone well, though in such circumstances a mare is better loose, and usually requires but little attention.

To see his stock increase and his young animals grow is, of course, a joy to the farmer all the world over, but especially so to the pioneer settler, and this often apart from the prospect of material gain. Many such have left their native land and the life of cities from an inborn love of natural surroundings, and the miracle of life and the sight of the young animals revelling in it are of never-failing delight.

The crops were now approaching a critical stage. Their success or failure means so much, not only to the growers themselves but to the whole prairie country, including the towns, and indeed to all Canada, that the prospects are a constant subject of discussion.

The simple fact is, that what to the British town-dweller, secure of his daily bread (if he has the money to pay for it), may seem a very prosaic and uninteresting round of daily toil, is to many a hardworking grain grower a great gamble.

We are, indeed, promised in the Scriptures that seed-time and harvest shall not fail, and it is true, for in a succession of years Nature evens things up wonderfully; but to the early settler the difference between a good and a bad harvest means so much that it may be doubted if the devotee of the racecourse or the gaming-table

AN INCREASING FAMILY.

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derives nearly as much excitement or real interest as does the ambitious young grain grower from his far more worthy occupation.

In a previous chapter I mentioned a piece of land which we had seen our friends seeding with wheat. It was a long strip, containing about fifty acres, sloping from fairly hilly ground at the south end for half a mile to a hollow, then rising slightly for a short distance to the north end.

We had watched the crop maturing with much interest, owing to the hopes we had for our own crops for the following season. Helped by the splendid July rains, it had grown amazingly, and now stood some six feet high in places, and very thick indeed. As a neighbour remarked in passing, it looked like going forty bushels to the acre. It had, however, grown very rank, and seemed late in filling out and maturing, though gradually turning colour.

One day the quiet Harry remarked: "I don't much like the look of that wheat; it does not seem to have much grain in it," and in response we all strolled out to have a look at it.

As we walked through it, rubbing out ears in our hands and noting immense numbers with no grain in, McBlair, the weed inspector, who also with his two sons had a large acreage, drove up,

and joining in our examination, we gathered round him to hear his experienced verdict.

He rubbed out a number of ears in the heavier parts of the field, then, shaking his head dolefully, remarked in a Scotch accent "A vara bad job; it must ha' been caught in the bloom by that touch of frost we had in July, and there's some rust in it, too, from all that wet weather."

A look of disappointment came over our friends' faces, and ours too, in sympathy with them.

"But surely there was no frost to hurt then," said Bob.

"Well, ye see," answered McBlair, "it was a bit late, and a vera little touch is enough when in bloom."

"Oh! cheer up; always merry and gay, that's my motto," said Sunny Jim.

"It may be a wee bit better up there on the hill," went on McBlair, "but aw'm thinking it be a poor year all round for a lot of us."

"Looked so good, too, one time," said Bob.

"That rain has made the stuff grow," continued McBlair, "but ye see there was too much of it, and it kept on growing instead of ripening. Then we have had no real hot weather to ripen it off, and it does not look like it now. We must start cutting soon," he continued, "but it's not fit."

All this was somewhat discouraging, but worse was to follow, as we shall soon see.

However, the next day was the one arranged by verbal message sent round the country-side for the annual picnic, and though the weather did not look encouraging, we prepared to enjoy ourselves; for it is characteristic of the prairie-folk that they try to keep up their spirits, however depressing the circumstances, and this is good, for, like the sailor and his ship, it is a poor job if those who have left their friends and country to make a home in a new one lose faith in it.

A good picnic, dance, concert, or farmers' meeting, such as the gatherings of the Grain Growers' Association, is usually the means of creating a social spirit and community of interest, so important in a newly settled district. The same may be said of religious services and Church meetings, but perhaps it would be still more so if people were more ready to recognize that, "though our creeds and rites may differ, yet our Faith and Hope are one."

As we arrived at the place chosen for the picnic, a two-story farmhouse with the usual log stable, neighbours were fast gathering.

Buggies, democrats (light vehicles for four or more), wagons with horse teams, and one or two ox teams, had arrived; but the community had

now reached a stage when horses prevailed at such gatherings, those who had them picking up their less fortunate friends.

The company consisted mostly of men, but there was a good sprinkling of women and children too. A few came on horseback, and the total numbered probably some seventy to eighty, with twelve or fourteen vehicles.

Teams were unhitched and tethered to wagons under the lee of neighbouring bluffs, and the company prepared to enjoy themselves in various ways.

The womenfolk had prepared an excellent supply of good things for the inner man, and there was a booth for the supply of soft drinks, i.e. non-intoxicants, also candy and other things for the children, while the bachelors made their contributions in cash.

There was football for the young men, also foot-races for men and children, not omitting a very popular one for women, or such as had enough vigour to engage in it. The younger men tried their strength, too, at throwing the heavy stones, and finally, there was a very popular horse and pony race. The elders found much interest in talking politics and of the prospects of the harvest, that ever-important topic.

One of the charms which usually mark such

occasions is the goodfellowship which prevails, for though the prairie is not free from those petty jealousies and misunderstandings to which poor human nature is so prone, yet in the early stages of settlement all are so much on the same level, and struggling with the same difficulties, that a true democratic spirit prevails.

Perhaps to many, capable of appreciating such a scene, the world has few more delightful ones to offer than a gathering of people of many nationalities, mostly young or in the prime of life, full of courage and hope and starting life, as it were, one and all in a new land on a virgin soil.

Such communities are dotted about all over the great West, and the individuals composing them have shaken off many of the conventionalities that are perhaps partly needful, but yet tend to mar the more artificial life of older civilization.

To those accustomed to the refinements of life in cities the whole thing may seem very rough and crude, but the conditions tend to emphasize the realities of life, and to rubbing off of mere varnish and veneer. So such gatherings may be full of interest and pleasure, and this is much enhanced if the weather proves propitious, as is often the case, with the fleets of great white clouds sailing across the blue in stately pro-

cession overhead and tempering the power of the sun.

One loves to dwell on the brilliance of the atmosphere, the exhilarating prairie breeze, and the cloud-shadows chasing each other across hills and hollows, and green bluffs with patches of yellow grain here and there.

On the present occasion, however, there was little sun; showers of rain fell, and there was a chilly wind, ominous presage of an early winter, and in spite of the general spirit of hope and the hilarity that prevailed, it was impossible entirely to discount the adverse conditions.

It was evidently high time to prepare my homestead for winter residence, and, the picnic over, we proceeded to Tom's and loaded up the wagon with the stove, tent, and nearly all our belongings, and with Nancy tied behind and her pretty foal running by her side or bounding in front, started for my place, where we once more set up our tent.

The first job was to haul the logs I had cut in the spring, which, as they were not far away, did not take us long, and then we began to build.

There was no time to hew the sides of the logs square, as is usually done in a timber country, nor were the logs suitable for that, so we commenced by laying two parallel at the right dis-

tance apart, and then, notching the ends and those of another pair to fit, we began to build, and soon had the walls about seven feet high.

This done, we proceeded to make door-frames from lumber we had reserved for the purpose, and from the pieces of timber cut out from the apertures, Tom commenced chinking the spaces between the logs of the walls. For this purpose he had, of course, to split the pieces. This done, we began on the roof, and supporting the centre with a stout post, laid the rafters, of poles about the same size as the before-mentioned fence-posts.

We next mixed a quantity of clay, which had come from our shallow dip-well, to the consistency of mortar, and carefully filled up and daubed every chink and cranny left between the logs. This is important in order to keep out the icy blasts of winter.

Having finished, we undertook the work of sodding up. Going to the breaking done in the spring, I cut the twelve-inch sods into three-feet lengths with an axe, while Tom loaded them on the wagon. With these we built a wall against the logs all round the shack, sloping the outside gradually inwards; and when we reached the roof we spread a good layer of hay on the rafters, and on this one thickness of sod and loose clay

to cover. Finally, we put in a window we had brought from town, hung the door, and put up and lit our stove.

When finished, the building looked like what one would imagine a little square brown fort would appear. It had taken us about a week, and we had still a stable of similar construction to put up, and both to surround with a railing to prevent cattle knocking down the sod walls.

Such a building makes an excellent one for a new settler to start with. It is snug and warm in winter, and cool in summer, if well made, besides being cheap (the materials being mostly on the spot); but the roof is often the weak part, for though it is all right in winter, it is a poor thing to keep out heavy rain.

It is well to emphasize the fact that the prairie winter cannot be played with, and on the advice of our friends and with the aid of Eaton's catalogue we had ordered a supply of winter clothing.

Moccasins, inner and outer, good for the dry hard weather, but useless for damp without rubber overshoes, working mitts and gauntlet mitts (fur covered for driving), sheepskin jackets with high collars, and fur caps with ear and neck covers, made quite a hole in our little capital, and we felt that really important item, a good fur coat, was beyond our means.

MY HOMESTEAD IN THE DISTANCE.

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"This must be a terrible country in the winter," remarked Tom one day to Pierre, who had dropped in to see us.

"Oh! go on," he replied; "I wear only dis, almos' all de winter;" and it is a fact that many hardened prairie-folk do go about in very severe weather with but little extra clothing; but from my experience I would rather be on the safe side, for bad frost-bite is no joke.

CHAPTER VI

A BAD HARVEST

WHILE we were building our shack and stable, Tom kept his gun handy and secured several prairie-chicken, which formed a very welcome addition to our food supply. These birds fly in coveys and may be shot on the wing, but are often so tame (especially in the early part of the season) that the poor sportsman in search of food can often stalk them and get easy pot-shots. While they have not much meat on their legs and wings, there is more on their breasts than is usually found on those of barn-door fowl.

The time of the August full moon, which is much dreaded as favourable to early frost, had come and gone without further serious damage to the crops, but the season was getting late, and the grain lacked heat to ripen it off and harden it.

The hope for really high-grade wheat had vanished, but men were trying to make the best of it, and binders were already at work with the

forlorn hope that the grain might yet not shrink much and harden in the shock.

While it is pretty generally understood a prosperous year or the reverse for the Western Provinces, and, indeed, for all Canada more or less, depends on a good harvest, a few more details as to the way in which it affects the man on the land may be acceptable in this place.

There is, of course, abundance of good land, that great attraction for millions, who seem to realize in a dim way that this means plenty of good food—of a sort, at least.

Now, those who go out with the hope of developing this good land, though by no means among the world's most poverty-stricken, are usually miserably supplied with capital, the consequence being that a vast system of credit is built up, not easily realized by people accustomed to older communities.

The actual amounts, of course, may seem small to those familiar with the complex finance and banking of old and wealthy nations, but the shortage of capital makes the rate of interest very high, which of course increases the trouble. The established farm-settler, with perhaps two hundred acres under crop, may be in a position to weather one or two bad harvests; but even he may find a difficulty in meeting notes due

for his machinery, and in paying the wages due to his hired man, which range from twenty to thirty dollars a month, and higher during harvest; this is of course made more difficult for him by the inability of poor neighbours to honour the notes they have given him in payment for an ox, a cow, or a horse, their own crop having failed, and also being disappointed of the high wages they had hoped to earn by helping harvest, and especially thresh, their more prosperous neighbours' crops.

This will become apparent as it affected Tom and myself, but a word first as to these notes. They are called "lien notes," and are of course undertakings to pay on a given date for a certain article or animal named thereon—as, for instance, "a red and white ox called Tom"—and when duly registered constitute a lien on the animal or goods, which may not be sold again until the note is redeemed—in fact, a mortgage. Provisions as to interest may be added, say, at about 8 per cent., which is also a common rate with the banks, which, it may be noted in passing, rarely or never lend on land, mortgages on land being commonly negotiated with loan companies.

Credit, too, for groceries is often needful from the storekeepers in the little towns dotted along

the railroads, and it is needless to point out how this reacts on prices.

Still less is it any part of the present writer's purpose to deal with the extraordinary paper booming of real estate in the growing cities, and I merely refer to them as being affected by good or bad harvests.

As we were completing our work on the shack and stable, the weather improved considerably, and the last day it was magnificent. There was little or no wind, and the sun shone with great power, while the mosquitoes were still strongly in evidence.

"If this lasts," remarked Tom, "we are going to get something out of the harvest after all, I should think."

"Possibly; but there's a proverb about too previous counting of chickens, and anyway, you wait and see," I returned.

"Oh! get out with your proverbs and waiting; I guess we ought to be hitting the trail," said my companion.

"That is true, too, and we will be off first thing to-morrow morning," I replied.

As we closed our day's work, the sun sank a ball of molten fire, while in the south-east the nearly full moon shone a disc of silver from the glorious purple vault, but there was a keen sting

in the air which made it pleasant to stand over the stove as we prepared our supper.

Next morning we were early astir, and found the prairie lying under a cold fog, with a white frost covering everything.

"How about those chickens you were counting on now?" said I to my companion, as we hitched up our team.

"Does look bad, but we shall soon hear what those chaps on No. 9 have got to say about it," returned Tom.

We followed the trail which led to our friends' place with some difficulty, and Naney, who was tied behind as usual, kept her foal near by constant whinnying.

As the sun gained power, however, the mist gradually lifted, and disclosed one of the most glorious of Nature's scenes our eyes had ever rested on. From every blade of grass, from every sprig of willow and poplar in the bluffs, there flashed and scintillated a gorgeous array of diamonds.

Myriads and myriads of tiny points, up to great crystals of iee a quarter or half an inch square, shone in the sun, and as we passed the lake we noticed that it was sheeted with glittering ice; but, alas, in many of the deeper hollows, and over many a large patch of standing grain, the mist

still hung thick, to remind us that all wheat (and there was a lot of it) not sufficiently matured was either badly damaged or totally ruined for milling purposes. Oats, too, stricken by this frost would be useless for seed, though they might still be used for feed.

"Hullo! here's some weather to cheer you up! What do you think of this smiling country and its smiling wheatfields now?" was Sunny Jim's greeting as we drove up.

"Just look at that crop—not worth cutting," said Harry, pointing to their sixty acres.

Tom remarked it was hard luck, and I asked, "Is none of it any good?"

"We may cut a bit and feed it to pigs, and burn off the rest, if it will burn," said Bob, and asked: "Where are you fellows going, anyway?"

"To look for shocking or stacking work; can you tell us where to find it?" I answered.

They advised us to go further south, where there was some lighter land with a southern slope, which in a damp, cool season like this had probably fared somewhat better.

They also advised us to try and pick good men who could and would treat us right, and gave us the names of several who might be wanting help.

"Got your sheepskins?" one of them asked as we started.

"Right oh!" we replied, and drove off, but that day at least proved warm and sunny.

During the afternoon we came to one of the homesteads our friends had told us of, where a man on a great eight-foot binder, to which were harnessed four horses, was steadily making his way round a field which looked like a hundred acres. We drove to the part nearest his house and waited till he came round, when he stopped the great machine.

"Crop looks pretty good, eh?" I asked.

"A lot of it badly frosted in places," he replied, and added: "I guess I must cut it and make the best of it."

"Want any help?" was the next question.

He got down from his seat, and pulling a few ears, slowly rubbed them out in his hands, and holding one between his fingers for both of us, who now stood beside him, he remarked:

"See the water coming out of it? However," he continued, "some of it on the hill there was pretty hard before last night's frost, and I could do with a man for a week or so."

After some further talk he agreed to engage Tom at two dollars a day; with more experience on Tom's part it should have been two and a half or three.

Thompson, Tom's new boss, showed him how

he wanted the shocks put up—six sheaves against each other, then one at each end, and finally two on top, so placed that they would shoot off the wet; adding that if he could do twenty acres a day well—that is, about as much as the machine could cut—he would give him two and a half dollars a day.

Tom was a strong young fellow, but I doubted his ability to accomplish this task, though it is said some men can.

The machines, however, are usually fitted with bundle carriers, which deposit five or six sheaves in a heap, and as these heaps are dropped in rows, it makes the work easier.

Thompson now told me there was a man named Jones, living about two miles further on, who with his son had two homesteads close together, and as he had a lot of oats and wheat, he might be glad of help both from myself and the team, so, saying "So long" to both men, and leaving Tom Nancy and her foal to look after, I struck the trail again.

The sun was once more setting a red ball, and the moon rising clear and cold in the purple, when I reached Mr. Jones's.

He and his son were busy stabling their horses and doing the evening chores when I arrived.

"Any chance of a night's lodging? I am

come from a bit north and am looking for a harvesting job," I said to Jones, as he came out of the stable.

"Ain't you one of the boys that's friends with them fellows on nine?" he asked.

"That's so," I answered.

"Well, come on in, and we will see what the missus can do for you."

As I walked with him, I noticed that though the house was one of the usual sodded shacks, there was a good granary built of logs and a small barn, besides several haystacks, and a lot of implements scattered about; from which apparently Mr. Jones was at least well "fixed," though whether he also had a good crop of debts was not so clear.

Mrs. Jones and her son welcomed me with a curt "Howdye?" and it seemed to be taken for granted that I should be fixed up for the night somehow, and Andy—the son—went with me to put the oxen into a rough sod stable, an early erection.

After a plentiful supper of the usual fried pork and potatoes, washed down with strong tea, pipes were lighted, and we sat down to discuss the situation.

It seemed the three had come from Ontario some seven years before, and settled here in the

confident expectation of the early opening of the long delayed railroad.

The father and son had homesteaded two quarter sections (three hundred and sixty acres) side by side, and having worked hard, had this year two hundred acres of crop, so it was pretty obvious that if it was to be reasonably well harvested they wanted help.

"I opine it's going to be a bad year," said Jones.

"Anyway," said I, "if you want help, I want a job and money."

"Will you come on for a week with your team at three dollars a day?" said Jones.

"What work have you for the bulls?" I asked.

"Well," said he, "though a lot of the wheat is badly froze, and I doubt will be hardly worth threshing, there's a hundred acres of oats pretty fair, and I figure we had better go to work and stack them, or they may be snowed under before we get the threshing outfit."

"But," said I, "three dollars a day is not enough for self and team."

"Not for all the time," he answered, "but we only want them for stacking."

The arrangement seemed to me dubious, for a man and team during harvest should be worth more, so I looked at Andy with a smile and remarked:

"In my place, guess you would want more?"

"Mebbe, mebbe!" said the young fellow.

"You must stand me another half dollar," I remarked.

"Well, we will call it that," said Jones.

Though there was slight frost in the night, the next day proved fair, and we were early at work.

They had already cut and shocked some forty acres of wheat, and Jones started in with his fine team on the oats, deciding to leave the wheat awhile, as it was very poor, and it was more important to try and save the oats, which were now the most valuable crop.

In places they were so heavy that the eight-foot binder would only take a four-foot cut, but the sheaves were so rank and green about the butts that some of them must have weighed forty pounds or more, and it took Andy and myself all our time to keep up with the binder.

To the British farmer it may seem strange that three men should hope to handle a crop of two hundred acres under such circumstances, and indeed it is a tough job; nevertheless, it is the sort of thing that is constantly done on the prairie.

To harvest the crop of such a season as we were experiencing adds enormously to the labour,

as there is so much straw; however, at the end of the day we estimated that we had cut and shocked ten acres, and felt well pleased, though my arms fairly ached with the weight of those sheaves.

The weather became overcast, though it did not actually rain or snow, and as we were now in October, the season was too far advanced for any more waiting, and it was necessary to push on with the reaping as fast as possible.

Steadily, day after day, we worked at the oats, Jones driving the great binder most of the time, though occasionally Andy took a round or so, and once let me try a round; and I realized, as I had not hitherto done, that to drive a four-horse team on one of these machines and keep the machine going well demands both practice and constant attention.

In about ten days we had finished the oats; then there came a flurry of snow, covering the ground and the tops of the shocks. It stopped all operations for the time, and warned us of the rapid approach of winter.

At this juncture Tom turned up, having finished the shocking of the wheat for his boss, and Jones offered him two dollars a day for his help in stacking if the weather permitted.

In a couple of days the snow had disappeared

sufficiently to allow us to begin on the oats that were first cut. Jones himself, however, decided to finish cutting the remaining wheat, taking Tom to do the shocking, while his son and I were to begin stacking the oats with the team of bulls.

As the sheaves were still very heavy to handle, it was decided to build as small stacks as we reasonably could. These stacks are usually placed in square groups of four, with space between each stack to allow the separator to be run in between. They are not thatched, and are often temporary, to save the grain and facilitate threshing, but it is important to keep out rain or melted snow, so there is considerable art required in building a good stack.

The most approved method seems to be to commence by building a large round shock in the centre, then to work spirally outwards, or rather in rings, beginning the next ring where the last finished. The butts, of course, are laid outwards, but the head of each sheaf should rest on and overlay the butts of those forming the next inside ring.

The stacks may be about twenty or twenty-five feet in diameter, and as the centre should be kept high, the arrangement has the effect of giving the layers of sheaves a constant outward slope, and when the outer ring is reached, it should

each time be laid at an angle just sufficient to permit it to lie firmly without slipping off the stack.

At a height of ten or twelve feet the successive rings of sheaves are gradually drawn inwards, filling up the centre, and the roof carried up to a point at a sharp angle.

Such a stack is wonderfully weatherproof if well built, and a series of such groups on a large field is a pretty sight, though the farmer usually prefers to thresh from the shock, as it means far less labour, as we shall see.

When the cutting and shocking of the wheat were finished, Jones harnessed a pair of horses to *their* rack, and with Tom joined us at the stacking, working on another row of shocks. In each case we began by throwing sheaves on to the racks until they were nearly full, when Tom and I mounted our respective loads, while Jones and his son pitched to us.

As soon as we had a load we drew to the stacks, and Tom and I pitched off to the others, who had more experience at stack-building; for both of us found that this apparently simple work calls for attention and practice, as there is quite an art in handling sheaves well with a fork.

Owing to the great weight of the sheaves, which

were still very far from being dry, we were unable to put up large loads. It may, however, be noted that it is a common practice on the Canadian prairie to cut the grain before it is ripe, as it usually is when cut in Britain, owing to the shortness of the season making the danger of frost imminent, and also from the shortage of the labour supply.

Another fall of snow put a stop to our operations before the stacking was quite finished, and Jones concluded to do no more, so he gave us some of our wages on account, and promised to pay us the rest after threshing; and as we had confidence in him we were satisfied with this arrangement, and Tom's boss having done the same, we now started for jobs on a threshing gang.

Passing No. 9, we just called in to see how our friends there were getting on, and were very sorry to find that the sixty acres which formed the best part of their whole crop had proved useless, and they had tried to get rid of it by burning, to have the land ready for the spring seeding.

It would not burn in the evening, and during the day, if there was a breeze, it was not safe. Some they had cut with a mowing-machine and succeeded in burning safely; some they had cut and stacked and would feed to their stock;

though wheat is not so good as oats for this purpose, and I just mention the matter of this unfortunate crop here again to show the extra labour and trouble, besides loss, that a really badly frozen crop of wheat may entail on the owner.

It is true that if left till the spring it may hold the snow from drifting, as long stubble does, and so conserve the moisture for the next crop.

Seeding is, of course, often done on stubble without re-ploughing, the land being perhaps disced once or twice first, and a very good crop may be the result; but in either case the old stuff must be got rid of, and when this will burn, the prairie probably will also, so there is great danger.

In such a case it may even be wisest to incur the expense of binder-twine and the labour of cutting, and then burn the sheaves to get rid of the stuff, which is obviously not worth threshing.

Oats are, of course, a different matter, as even if frozen they may be good for feed, and the straw is better for the same purpose than that of wheat.

CHAPTER VII

THRESHING

By this time we knew that threshing was well under way further to the south, for each evening during the past week the horizon and sky or cloud above had been lit up with the light of burning straw-stacks. "What waste!" exclaims the British farmer; and so it is, in one sense, but in the early stages of settlement it seems the only course to adopt, for there are not enough stock to make use of the straw, while the enormous quantity, coupled with distance and cost of freight to more populous centres, make burning the only method of getting rid of it.

Hearing that a Mr. S—— had a powerful outfit and usually employed a large gang, also that attached to it was a caboose for cooking meals and sleeping purposes, we decided to try him for a job.

The caboose, which is a sort of large gipsy van, adds much to the comfort of those engaged in the work, and, as we shall see later on, where

there is no such adjunct such are liable to poor fare and even worse privations.

In about two hours' time we arrived at Mr. S——'s place, and as it was just dinner-time he and his good wife made us welcome to the meal. We were, however, disappointed to find that he was not pulling out with the threshing outfit at present at all.

He was a communicative man, and during dinner and afterwards waxed quite eloquent on the woes of the thresher-man, especially in a season like the present one.

"The fact is," said he, "four-fifths of the grain is not worth threshing if a fair price is paid for doing it; besides, if it were, it is not fit about here yet—it's far too green and tough"; and he went on: "If it is ever fit, there's so much straw to put through for the little grain there is, that I doubt if it will pay at all, and a lot of what grain there is is so light that in many cases it wants blowing out to make a decent sample. In some crops," he added, "an aftergrowth has sprung, with little or very light grain in it."

Then he went on to explain that such an outfit as his—with the separator supplied with all the latest improvements, such as a band-cutter, sheaf-carrier, and a high bagger and wind-stacker—was a costly affair in the first place, and to run

to advantage from the shock should be able to thresh an enormous quantity of grain in a day—that is, if the price charged were reasonable, say seven cents for wheat.

On the other hand, if he charged at a rate that would pay him, it was ruinous to the grower, even if he had the money to pay; and he added sardonically: "That's what a lot of them won't have—this year, anyway."

"Don't you know the saying, that when a man buys a threshing outfit there goes his farm?" he asked; adding: "I fear it is true of a good many, for most of us who have them are heavily in debt."

"Anyway, there's no chance of a job with you now," remarked Tom.

"That's about it," said Mr. S——, and went on: "I've a hundred acres in shock myself, and may try to knock it out later for pig-feed, but I doubt it would pay me better to put a match to each shock and be done with it."

"Do you think we can get a job with a gang anywhere?" I asked.

"Well," said Mr. S——, "Jerry B——, about four miles east of here, has a little outfit, and I guess he has to try and do something with it, or he may lose it, and perhaps his homestead too; you might try him."

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"Let's go and try," said Tom; so, thanking our host and hostess, we hitched up and struck the trail once more.

Following the trail pointed out to us, we arrived just as the sun was setting at a homestead near a little slough, where we found Jerry and a neighbour busy at work getting a small separator and engine ready for a start on the morrow. They were assisted by a young Englishman who had undertaken to drive the engine.

After looking on for a few minutes and identifying Jerry, I asked if another team and two more hands were wanted. At this Jerry, dusty and with oil-blackened hands, looked up from his work of tightening up the nuts of a bearing, and after eyeing us and our team, asked if e had any crop of our own to thresh.

On receiving a reply in the negative, as it was our first season, he said: "We could do with your help, and if you had a crop to thresh, might have put that against the hire." After some further conversation, he agreed to put us on at five dollars per day for ourselves and team, and two each if he needed us for stack-threshing without the team, but remarked: "I tell you straight, you will have to wait for your money till I get some."

The arrangement was, of course, not a very satisfactory one from our point of view; but, as

aforesaid, Canada is the land of hope, and in a season like the present it seemed wisest to work in with the rest and do our best.

Jerry lived with his father, an elderly man who had left the Old Country forty years before and settled in Nova Scotia, and moving with his son recently to the new Western lands, had made a home here.

They already had the engineer quartered on them, and as they were obviously very busy, and we were not really engaged until the outfit started, we sought supper, lodging, and breakfast at a near neighbour's. We knew that threshing with a small gang like this was a roughish job, and had brought our blankets, prepared to coil ourselves up in any handy place.

The oxen were safely tethered to the wagon and fed. Nancy was also picketed, but she and her foal had proved rather a trouble, and we decided that come Sunday one of us would take them home and put them in the pasture, where there were plenty of feed and some water.

Next day proved fine; the last fall of snow had disappeared, and though the days were rapidly shortening, there seemed some prospect of our enjoying a spell of the short Indian summer.

Our hosts would not accept payment, though we persuaded the eldest boy to accept a dollar

for shells for his gun, and having breakfasted, we set forth with the outfit to make a start on forty acres of wheat about a mile away.

The lumbering gasolene engine, drawing the separator and a wagon containing casks of gasolene and sundry impedimenta, soon arrived on the scene of operations, and after a little delay work began.

Even with this small outfit the scene was a busy one; there were three teams of oxen, including ours, which I drove, and one team of horses employed in hauling sheaves to the separator.

Our work was to drive our rack from shock to shock, pitching on to our racks and climbing up to arrange the sheaves from time to time until we had a load; then, keeping our turn, we would haul to the separator a rack on each side, and pitch our sheaves to the band-cutters, who in turn passed them to the feeder.

When the machine was running well it took us all our time to keep up with it, and we were not sorry when once or twice during the morning there was a stop for a few minutes owing to the engine misfiring, or to adjust the belt, or from some other cause.

In addition to the teams already mentioned, there were a man and boy with two light horses

who worked a sweep for removing the straw in the manner mentioned for haying.

The farmer also for whom we were threshing had a team for hauling the grain to the granary, using two wagons, one of which was left at the separator till full, when he hitched his team to it and drew off, while the empty one took its place.

Jerry gave Tom the job of tending the bags, which are alternately fastened to a pair of spouts to which an automatic counter is also fitted, which roughly measures the number of bushels threshed. As the bags of grain fill up they are emptied into the wagon-box in bulk.

From the foregoing it will be seen that it takes from ten to twelve men to work a small outfit like the one I am describing, and as in such cases it is usual for the farmer whose grain is being threshed to feed the gang, such times are busy occasions for the farmer's wife, if he has one.

A kindly neighbour is often on hand to assist; but, alas, there is often neither wife nor feminine neighbour, and the bachelor must struggle through the best way he can. Perhaps, however, the case is hardly as bad as it looks, for most prairie homesteaders know how to cook a bit, and if timely provision is made, and there is plenty of food on hand, some one is told off who can be trusted to cook a good dinner. In the

present case, though the farmer was a bachelor, the wife of a neighbour was on hand, and when dinner-time came we were all ready and able to do justice to the excellent meal she had prepared.

There is something about one of these threshing meals that reminds one of the old harvest-home suppers that used to be held in many a farmhouse kitchen in the old days in far-away Britain, but here, in place of the typical Anglo-Saxon, are often to be found men of various races. In this case there were Britons, Americans, a French-Canadian, two Galicians, a Russian, and a German.

In place, too, of the centuries-old kitchen was a little shack, into the living-room of which we could just crowd and sit on boxes, or even a bucket upside down, round a table added to by a couple of rough planks.

When it is remembered that on a Canadian farm meat in some form is usually served three times a day, the large amount that can be put away during a few days' visit by a gang of hungry thresher-men can be imagined. It is, of course, common for farmers to kill their own pork or beef for such occasions.

After the meal, work soon began again, and before long we had to move the outfit, having

cleared the field in proximity to its first position. The work went on well into the darkness, for the days were shortening very rapidly now, and when it ceased we were quite ready for supper.

Two of the gang who lived near went home for the night, while the rest of us rolled ourselves in our blankets, either on the floor of the shack or on a bed of hay in an outbuilding, and Tom remarked, as he and I chose the latter, that "A man can usually survive with food, drink, warmth, and shelter."

We were up again soon after daybreak, the animals fed, breakfast eaten, and work begun.

The yield was about fifteen bushels to the acre, and was coming down the spout shrivelled and tough, with a feel that promised a danger of heating. In fact, it was obviously little better than pig-feed, and the price at the elevator more than twenty miles away would probably not exceed fifty cents a bushel, even if they would take it there at all.

Now, with the price for threshing at ten cents a bushel, it is easily calculated how very little, if any, profit there was for either threshing-man or grower out of such a crop.

The following day being Sunday, we both decided to return to my homestead with Nancy and her foal, and rejoin the outfit on the Monday

morning. We found it at a farm where some of the grain had been stacked. For this work, of course, the stook teams were not needed, but as several of the gang had not returned after going to their homes on Saturday, Jerry was glad of our help, and we were soon on a stack pitching the sheaves on to the separator to have their bands cut and be fed into the cylinder.

For such threshing the price per bushel is of course much less, as so much work has already been done, but it may easily be from four to six cents, according to the crop, and as large fields are often grown by a single homesteader, it is beyond his power to stack it.

Then came the threshing of a field of oats from the shock, which yielded fairly well and were not so much damaged as the wheat, as the yield was about eighty bushels to the acre. They fall from the separator so fast that the men at the spouts with bags and wagons have some difficulty in keeping pace with the flow. Thus threshing of various kinds continued for about two weeks under more or less difficulty and discouragement.

One or other of us visited my homestead on several occasions to see that Nancy had water, as the sloughs were now becoming thickly covered with ice.

The end of the threshing was now rapidly approaching, for a time at least, for we turned out one morning to find that the thermometer in the night had fallen to twenty degrees below zero, and there was much difficulty in getting the gasolene to vaporize enough to start the engine.

Then came a snowfall. Nevertheless, after a delay of a day, we made an effort to go on by digging shocks out of the snow, and persisted until one or two were frostbitten in the bitter wind that swept across the open prairie. It is only fair, however, to say that before this time came we had a few glorious autumn days.

With the coming of frost the mosquitoes had disappeared, the wild ducks and geese had long since gone South, the latter flying overhead, far up towards the blue, in wedge-shaped squadrons. Here and there they may alight on a lakelet or river to rest, but not many fall to the gun of the busy settler.

On several mornings, as the brilliant sun shone on work the frost wrought on every particle of moisture deposited on grass and shrub, our eyes rested on a vision of loveliness which for the time made us forget the day's labour before us.

Indeed, on a still and clear autumn day there was a certain joy in the work for its own sake, and we did not at all hanker after the British

THRESHING SCENE.

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office in the month of November, which had now come. On one such day we were threshing a crop of flax going about ten bushels to the acre, and as this crop is not so easily damaged by frost, it was rather more encouraging.

It is, however, a very difficult crop to thresh, and, indeed, to handle generally, and opinions differ as to the best way to deal with it. Some advocate dumping it off the binder in little heaps, which can be turned over with a fork like hay to facilitate drying, and there are special attachments sold for the binders for this purpose. The most approved practice, however, seems to be to bind it in the ordinary way and place in small shocks, which it is said may be left out all the winter and threshed in the spring without damage.

As the straw is very tough and apt to mat together, it is very liable to wind round the cylinder of the separator, causing vexatious delays and increasing the cost of threshing, though here again special attachments can be supplied to assist in the operation.

The price for threshing a crop of tough flax may be as high as twenty cents a bushel, and the Winnipeg prices seem to fluctuate a good deal; but as they may easily range from a dollar and a half to two dollars, and the yield of a good crop may run from fifteen to twenty bushels to

the acre, it is sometimes a very profitable crop, and is often grown on new land. Indeed, it is said that one good crop will sometimes pay for the land it is grown on, and under favourable conditions this may easily be the case. It has disadvantages for the beginner, being very liable to weeds, and unless one can ship a car-load, which means a large acreage, there may be difficulties in disposing of it, as the elevators may refuse it, especially when busy with other grain.

At present but little use is made of the straw or fibre, though attempts have been made to manufacture binder twine from it with some success. Manila, however, seems more in favour. Cattle will pick it over, and parts would seem excellent food for them, but most is burnt in the fall or spring, and on several occasions we had fine bonfires of straw of different kinds as we finished threshing.

As these short autumn days passed into night, the stars came out one by one and shone with a brilliance uncommon in the British atmosphere, and occasionally we had a wonderful display of the northern lights, which, however, are, I believe, usually a precursor of bad weather. Be that as it may, auroral displays were common during this autumn. The centre of such beautiful natural phenomena appeared to be in the direction of the

magnetic pole, which from our position on the prairie was probably about fifteen degrees to the eastward of the true north.

Often they took the form of an arch of light with streamers shooting upwards from it, which appeared and disappeared and rapidly varied in intensity. On other occasions the greater part of the northern heavens seemed to be hung with coloured draperies, appearing and reappearing in ripples and wavelets of rosy vapour. The light spread over the sky in such a way that the moon and some stars were seen through it.

Surely the pioneer settler may place the opportunity of viewing such beautiful and apparently harmless manifestations of the great Creator's power against some of the hardships and difficulties of his life. And in this connection, one may point out that, in spite of its strenuous character, the life offers to thoughtful minds many opportunities for the study of the wonderful phenomena of nature and their observation in many fields.

One is reminded of the beautiful lines of William Watson :

When overarched by gorgeous night I wave my trivial self away,
And all I was in all men's sight shares the erasure of the day,
Then do I cast my burdening load, then do I gain a sense of God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMING OF WINTER

"I SUPPOSE this is what you call the freeze-up?" remarked Tom, as we pursued our way towards my homestead.

"I guess that's about it, and the sooner we make ourselves snug the better," I returned.

It was one of the grey days—that is to say, the clouds over our heads were grey, but the landscape might be described as a study in black and white—black where there were almost leafless bluffs of willow and poplar, white elsewhere, with its snowy mantle. True, there were bits of the trail which the wind had swept clear of the dry, sand-like snow, but they were too insignificant to count much in the general appearance, while in hollows, and under the lee of bluffs or obstructions to the free sweep of the wind, drifts had begun to form.

The badger-holes, too, had become mostly obliterated, making travel across the open prairie more difficult, while if one inadvertently plunges

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into one of the hollows known as buffalo wallows, especially with a load, trouble may ensue.

At such times, however, the knowledge or instinct of the animals often comes to the help of the traveller, and if he drives them in a sort of mutually confidential way, they will not only help him to avoid mishap, but also aid him to find his way amid the changed appearance of the landmarks and over the partially hidden trails to his desired haven.

In a district such as that described, which was fairly well settled, a man may easily become lost at night if the sky is decidedly overcast, or by day if foggy, as sometimes happens, or in an ordinary snowstorm, to say nothing of a blizzard.

In such cases a true idea of direction is a great thing, and for this purpose a compass, costing only a few cents, may be of great service, as a real sense of direction will often help one to strike a fence or piece of breaking or well-defined road, and thus ascertain one's whereabouts.

I know a case in which two men who knew the country well followed a trail or, indeed, road for a long distance due south, instead of due north.

Although the winter on the Canadian prairie is not as bad as is sometimes supposed, as I shall endeavour to show, those who propose making

their home there should realize that it cannot be played with; and it is well for the settler in a new district to be (as the sailor who knows his business should be) constantly on his guard against deceptive and apparently harmless, and even pleasant, weather conditions. Otherwise he may be caught napping, and awake, as it were, to find himself in almost desperate straits. Especially is this the case with those who may have to move about from some cause, or who, quite sensibly, pay visits or attend social gatherings with wives and children.

In the early stages of settlement the distances covered may mean hours of travel through a little-known country, and the weather may have been fine for weeks, and people congratulating one another on the beautiful winter they are enjoying, when a real blizzard may spring up with very little warning and place the party in great peril.

We had recently heard that a neighbour near whose house we had to pass had just killed a beef, so we stopped to see if he would sell us some. He readily agreed to, and asked how much we would take. As the winter, or freeze-up, as it is called, had now fairly come, and one of its advantages is that meat can be frozen and will keep for months, we were glad to purchase

a hind quarter, which he let us have at seven cents a pound, and as it was midday, he invited us to sample the meat by enjoying a nice bit of steak, and then, once more pursuing our way, we soon arrived at my homestead.

After supper we passed an hour or so in taking stock of our financial position, which as far as the balance remaining in the bank went did not look very encouraging.

As we had spent about six hundred dollars, we still had four hundred in the bank, but it must be remembered we had to provide not only for groceries and other food supplies, but also seed for seventy acres, and could expect no return from our crop for a twelvemonth at least. On the other hand, as a distinct asset we had seventy acres of good land broken and ready for seeding, and if only we were favoured with a good season we might look forward hopefully. Of course, we also had our good Joe and Nigger, Nancy and her foal, two decent shacks, with a start on implements and tools. Indeed, we felt so hopeful that we fell into a debate as to whether we could afford a cow; and here I touch on a matter which I hope later to refer to at greater length, viz. the stock versus or in addition to grain question.

Tom thought we could do well enough with

canned milk, or even none at all, while I, usually the more conservative, maintained that if we could pick up a cow for forty or fifty dollars it would be money well invested.

Tom said she would be such a bother when we came to move about next spring, and besides, he knew nothing about milking.

To which I returned we could easily take her with us, as we had done Nancy; and as regards milking, the sooner he learnt the better.

So at length we decided that if we could strike a bargain with either of the men who already owed us money for our labour we would have a cow.

This eventually proved to be the case with Jones, and we brought Bossy proudly home, and having also bought a simple stone-jar churn and deep milkcan, were soon able to enjoy our own butter and milk, not to mention cream, if we wished it.

As the cream milkcan is a very useful article for the one or two cowkeeper, and I have never seen one in Britain, I will describe it: About eighteen inches high and ten inches in diameter, it has a top with a hole covered with a wire-gauze strainer, and the top when reversed is used for straining. At the bottom there is a tap for drawing off the skimmed milk, and a glass

or piece of mica fitted in a slit close to the bottom allows the operator to see when he or she must close the tap to retain the cream. This simple contrivance obviates the need for a separator, and is fairly effective.

Next day we finished fixing up the stable for our animals, and then set out to cut firewood, as it is well always to have a good stock on hand. It is an occupation that can often be followed with advantage in the winter, and as we had plenty of poplar near at hand as yet, it was pretty simple work.

One thing our shack lacked, viz. a cellar. This is a very important adjunct both for winter and summer, but especially the former, as it enables one to keep a supply of potatoes and other vegetables free from frost, while in the summer meat and butter, also milk, can be kept much longer. A cellar, however, requires a board floor for the shack, and as yet we had to be content with an earthen one.

While we were living in the shack it kept fairly warm, and by keeping the few vegetables we had bought from a neighbour near the stove, we managed to preserve them fairly free from frost.

Our store of meat we hung outside, protected by a few boards, where the temperature

would not rise above freezing-point probably for months now.

A few of my readers may have read in times long ago of the Ice Palace and Winter Carnival which used to be held at Montreal, and, prompted by tourist posters of winter sports in Switzerland, imagined the prairie in winter as a second Davos or St. Moritz. If so, the sooner they dismiss the idea the better.

In these days, when it is the ambition of many Canadians for their country to pose as the granary of the Empire, if not of the world, it would not at all fit in with the schemes of the financial interests which are trying to exploit the Prairie Provinces to build ice palaces and hold carnivals of winter sports. Such things may have been, and perhaps may be again, but do not go well with glowing pictorial advertisements of rich cornfields and fruit orchards. Nevertheless, there are some glorious winter days when there is little or no wind, but brilliant sunshine with the thermometer about zero, when a good bit of skating may be enjoyed. One such day there was near the beginning of the freeze-up, when Tom and I set forth to try what it was like on a large slough not far from my homestead.

We found that though it was rough round the edges, where the snow had drifted and lain,

there were some thirty acres of ice like plate-glass in the centre, which the wind had swept clear of snow. We were soon joined by one or two of our younger neighbours and two or three boys, and spent a very enjoyable hour or so. A slightly warmer spell and a fall of damper snow a few days later, however, spoiled this for the rest of the winter.

A rink can of course be cleared, and often is, but this means work for those who usually have plenty to do. Then there are those who enjoy a run on ski, or snow-shoes, but perhaps the greatest deterrent of winter sport on the prairie is the prevalence of the bitter winds that sweep across the vast open spaces. Bright sunshiny days of still zero weather are very pleasant, but when a strong wind gets up and the sky becomes overcast, as often happens, the case is very different, and when it is remembered that thirty and forty and even fifty degrees below zero are not uncommon, some idea of the severity of the weather conditions to be faced may be gauged.

Then, too, although the work is far less strenuous than in summer, there are animals to be fed and watered, barns and stables to be cleaned out, wood to be cut, and for those who are "baching it," as the saying is, there are cooking and

washing and clothes-mending. In short, the strenuous life leaves little time for outdoor sport.

With another snowfall we realized our need for a bob-sleigh, as when hauling wood the drifts were in places too deep for the wagon. However, by felling a good lot beforehand, and then borrowing a sleigh for a few days, we succeeded in securing some fifteen loads, some of which would come in for building operations if required later, while the poorer stuff would do for firewood. A bob-sleigh is similar to a wagon, but of course has runners instead of wheels, the front pair turning with the team, as in the action of a wagon. A wagon-box may be placed on it for freighting grain or other goods, or without the box it may be used as a timber carriage. It is much lower than a wagon, and for this reason much easier for loading and unloading timber. Its motion, too, over a good snow trail is easier; thus a good snowfall has many advantages.

If allowed to stand long after the runners have become warm with travelling, they may slightly thaw the snow and then become frozen to it, and the chagrin of a young settler may be imagined when, after he has toiled hard in putting on a heavy load of logs, he finds his team cannot start the sleigh. We, however, were forewarned,

OFF TO TOWN IN WINTER.

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and were careful to have the runners on pieces of timber before beginning to put on our loads.

The latitude being similar to that of Britain, the days and nights are of course about the same length, and they rapidly flew by. We did not turn out too early, for it was useless in the dark; but when we did, one of us lit the fire and prepared breakfast, while the other proceeded to feed the stock and milk the cow. After breakfast, clearing away and washing up and making some preparations for dinner, one of us would, mounted on Nancy, drive our little herd of livestock to water at the slough some half a mile away. Here the ice on the water-holes had to be broken, and when all had taken their daily drink, we usually returned soberly and in single file to stable. Sometimes, however, if the weather happened to be pleasant, the young cow or the foal would show an inclination for a gambol or desire for more liberty, and need rounding up, a proceeding which Nancy, having been a cattle pony, well understood and seemed rather to enjoy, even giving the straggler a sharp nip with her teeth. While one of us watered the stock the other usually cleaned out the stable, where the animals were carefully secured again on their arrival.

It is, of course, important that the stock in a

closed stable or barn should be very carefully secured, for if one gets loose serious trouble may easily ensue, and end in the loss of one or more valuable animals.

Then in the short afternoon there was wood to be sawn and split, and it is well during the winter to provide a good supply to last through the busy summer months.

Felling timber and hauling it of course varied the programme, but the above was the usual way in which the winter days passed. Some settlers leave the prairie in the winter and seek a job in the woods or in the towns, and for a competent woodsman, or one who can drop on a suitable job in town, it may be profitable to do so. Tom had some inclination to try his fortune, but it would involve expense at first, and after discussing the matter we decided to sit tight together, as this was our first season.

Some, on the other hand, come to the prairie during their winter off-season to fulfil their residence duties, paying another to do the necessary cultivation and cropping while they are working and earning money elsewhere.

Some readers may ask, "Are there no bear, deer, caribou, or moose to be shot to help out the food supply?" There are some to be found further north, among the thicker timber, but

as the settler comes in and the land gets more under cultivation, they naturally get more scarce. Parties are sometimes formed to go and try for some, but they seem to meet with very indifferent success, and for the settler who means farming, the game seems hardly worth the candle, as the saying is. There is, too, a certain amount of risk, as very inexperienced hunters are apt to join such parties, ready to shoot at any moving object among the timber, and a horse or ox, not to mention another hunter, may easily fall a victim to the rifle of such a one. So much is this the case that a discussion has arisen as to the propriety of hunters wearing a dress of some special colour to distinguish them from the hunted.

Perhaps the danger is hardly as great in these regions as in some parts of British Columbia, where inexperienced young fellows are apt to come out from the towns, ready to shoot at almost anything, especially between two shining objects, taking them for the eyes of deer or other wild animals, if they see them in the dark. Under these circumstances people may well go in fear for themselves and their stock.

CHAPTER IX

A TRIP TO TOWN, GRAIN HAULING AND SHIPPING

More snow having fallen, the winter trails had become better, and as we wanted a few more groceries, it was arranged that I should make the trip of twenty-seven miles into the town of F—— to purchase them. At this season there should be a certain amount of employment for teams in hauling grain to the elevators, or to load it direct into cars for shipment.

We, of course, had none of our own, and this year the grain was so poor and the outlook so bad that few of our neighbours cared to go to the expense of employing outside help.

It seemed a pity, however, to go in with an empty wagon, and one of our neighbours who had a middling sample engaged me to take in a load of wheat for him for two dollars, and see what I could get for it at the elevator.

A few words here may not be out of place as to the difficulties the growers have to con-

tend with in the shipment of their grain. So much has been said about the excellent methods of the elevators in helping farmers to realize their harvests, that the would-be colonist is apt entirely to mistake the position.

The truth is, that though the theory and some of the methods may be good, most growers would hail with derision a statement that they worked well in practice.

The general handling of grain in bulk instead of in bags (the common practice in Britain and some colonies) is probably far superior to the latter method, and effects a great saving of time and expense. Then, too, the plan by which, on delivering his load at the elevator, the grower receives a cheque for the value at the market price of the day for his grade of quality is good.

But to form an idea of the farmers' grievances in this matter we must begin further back. Now, it must be borne in mind that, though railroad construction has been very active, the country is so immense, and settlement has been so rapid and great, that it has pushed far ahead of the railroads, the consequence being that settlers are trying to grow grain fifty or a hundred or even more miles from existing railroads.

There was, for instance, a settlement thirty or forty miles north of us, although, as has been

said, we were twenty-six miles from the nearest railroad, and a man I met in town had come fifty miles with a load of wheat, for which he received the sum of eight dollars. The elevator man's comment was: "I don't blame him if he spends it in drink."

It may be asked, "Why do people settle under such conditions, and try to grow grain for profit?" Partly because in some parts railroads have been surveyed, and are shortly expected, though, alas, it may be long before they arrive.

But, of course, what is taking place is only a modern chapter in the long history of the settlement of the North American Continent. Drawn by glowing advertisement, and pushed forward as it were by his own land-hunger and the pressure of an ever-increasing population, the hopeful colonist from Eastern Canada, the United States, and Northern Europe sets forth.

It is true some of these settlers might adopt the words of Kipling:

> We were dreamers, dreaming greatly, in the man-stifled town,
> We yearned beyond the skyline, where the great roads go down;

but of many it may be said they are hard-headed men, not lacking in judgment, who, knowing that in the States and Manitoba the good

lands have been covered with a network of iron roads, believe the same must follow rapidly in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Thus thinking, it seems to them a wise step to look well ahead and secure good land, even if for the present far away, and beyond the apparent operations of the railroad magnates, whom one might almost call "the uncrowned kings of Western Canada."

Also, the homestead laws have recently favoured the proving up of the patent or freehold by the breaking up and cropping of so many acres, rather than by the keeping of cattle; and as the latter plan means either money or time or both, before remunerative herds are got together, it is not easy to see what the *bona fide* settler can do but try to grow grain.

Further, as it seems to him that every load of decent grain that he can deliver at the elevator means to him so much cash, and as he has not much for his team to do in the winter, and is almost obliged to make one or more trips to town, he may as well begin to sow grain.

In Britain we know something of the advantages of having a railway near, not to mention competitive routes, but in these great new lands these advantages are probably increased fourfold.

In the matter of settlement, as before noted

of wheat growing, there is a great gambling element, for, should the expected railroad come near, as most settlers hope and believe it will, their lands may easily leap up 100 per cent. or even more in value.

But after this digression, let us get on into town with our load of wheat and see how we fare. The wagon-box on the sleigh has been loaded up at our neighbour's, some mile and a half away, the evening before, with fifty bushels. This is a fair load, all things considered, though much heavier ones are sometimes taken with teams of four animals.

Warmly clad in sheepskin coat, moccasins, and with fur cap drawn tightly over my ears and hands in mitts, I arrived and proceeded to hitch up Joe and Nigger, aided by a young fellow who happened to be going out for the winter. "Going out" is a term used to express leaving the prairie, and he was glad of a lift and the opportunity of my company, as I was of his. The weather was neither very bad nor was it very good, for it was overcast; the thermometer stood a few degrees below zero, and there was a cold breeze blowing.

Mounted on the spring seat on the front of the sleigh, with a heavy blanket over our legs, we set forth cheerily, and soon struck the main

road leading south, where we found the going better, as the trail had been pretty well broken.

Our rate of progress did not exceed three miles an hour, but the runners of the sleigh slid along with a pleasant hissing sound, and the time wore on as we chatted, in the intervals of urging on the bulls, especially Nigger, who was much slower than Joe.

After an hour or so we began to feel very cold, and decided to get down and walk awhile. A look at the noses of the oxen showed us their breath had frozen around parts of their coupling chain and headgear into pieces of solid ice, and looked white on their shaggy faces, necks, and shoulders.

It was necessary to walk beside the oxen to urge them on, and as this meant floundering through the snow, we took it in turns, one driving and one walking behind the sleigh for a time, and eventually both again mounted to the spring seat.

By midday we were glad to pull into the hospitable homestead of Mr. and Mrs. S——, where we not only got some dinner, but thoroughly warmed up before starting on the fourteen miles that remained.

During the afternoon we were overtaken by four horse teams proceeding in company to load

a car, and as the trail was not wide enough for them to pass us, though they could travel faster, we continued together for some distance. Thus doing, we met two sleighs loaded with lumber proceeding in the opposite direction. Such an occurrence sometimes leads to difficulty, as when the narrow trail gets heaped high, to leave it may easily lead to an upset.

The difficulty is, however, generally got over with good humour, and on the present occasion we all succeeded in persuading the men with the lumber to pull out, undertaking to help them to reload if an upset ensued. Fortunately, it did not, and as a side trail was now partly broken, we too pulled our load out to let the faster horse teams pass us.

Before darkness fell the tall elevators appeared in sight; but these can often be seen for a long distance, and the short winter's day had closed in and the lights of the little town appeared before we turned into the street, put the oxen into the livery barn, and made our way into the warm office of the hotel to thaw out our half-frozen limbs.

Then the evening West-bound train came through, making quite a little bustle, and dropping off one or two passengers.

The idea of a visit to town after a long stay

on the open prairie may seem attractive, but to one accustomed to even the moderate-sized English market town, it is to be feared the ordinary little prairie town is very uninviting. There are immense numbers of them dotted along the various lines of railroad, with populations ranging from twenty-five to one hundred and fifty, composed of people who have come together within the last ten or fifteen years, naturally ambitious for themselves and their towns.

A vast number of such places will probably never amount to much, for as new lines of railroad are run out, other tiny towns will spring up and tend to attract some of the trade the first already possess. Moreover, as a few forge ahead, it would seem natural for the trade to gravitate thither.

A few of these little places are what is known as "dry" towns, i.e. where no intoxicants are to be got, openly at least, and it would be well for the settlers if all were so; but it must be confessed that the dry towns are not very popular, and it is said that the hotels in such places can hardly be kept open at a profit.

Some of these small communities have a pool-room, where that form of billiards is played and soft drinks are sold, but there is a lack of amusement and recreation which is apt to make the

tiller of the soil, staying in town, and thus cut off from his usual healthy interests and avocations, take a good deal too much to drink.

I fear the above remarks may seem unkind towards many enterprising and worthy town-dwellers, from some of whom I have myself received help and consideration. My object, however, in referring to the matter is to give a true impression from the point of view of the agricultural settler, and while it is, of course, necessary for him to have centres for supply and distribution, it is to be feared there are often agencies at work in these towns through which he is exploited and plundered, and his great need in the early stages of settlement makes him an easy prey to such agencies. More on this matter may appear later, but let us now see about getting rid of our load of wheat.

I had arrived too late in the evening for this, but having seen to the oxen (for you do this yourself in the livery barn) and then breakfasted on the following morning, I set out to make inquiries. Two high, square, wooden tower-like erections which I knew to be grain elevators stood on the other side of the railroad. They were painted a sort of dull chocolate red, but large white letters advertised each as belonging to a certain elevator company. Now, in theory

they were competitors for the load of wheat I had brought to town, but I and others like myself had no means of knowing whether this was the case, or whether they were really in some combination for their own advantage and the disadvantage of the grower.

However, taking a sample of wheat from the sleigh, I walked across the railroad track to the nearest, and made my way to the little office attached to the building. Knocking at the door, a voice shouted "Come in!" and doing so, I found myself in the presence of two men, one smoking, the other reading a newspaper, Both men wore the usual blue jean overalls, and sat balanced on the hindlegs of their chairs.

"Who's the boss?" I asked, glancing from one to the other.

"That's me," said the man who was reading the paper, laying it down.

"I've brought in a load of G——'s wheat, and here's a sample. What's the best you can do for him?" I asked.

"Well," said he, as he took the sample, poured some into his hand, and examined it, "if I could take it, which I can't, I guess it would go No. 4, and I could stand you fifty cents a bushel."

"Can't take it?" I said inquiringly.

"Haven't room for another bushel, and haven't

been able to get an empty car to load for two days," was his next remark.

"Hard luck for you and me too," said I, and then added, "How comes it?"

The elevator man paused for a moment and then looked at me, and perhaps feeling a touch of sympathy, remarked:

"Sit ye down a bit, and I'll tell you. Guess you are new in this part, but, you see, at this time of year there is always a rush to get the stuff on the market, so shortage of cars is no new thing; but this year the winter has set in early and the lakes are frozen up, so the elevators at Fort William and Port Arthur are full, or pretty near. Then, you see," he went on, "there's been some snowdrifting, and you can't work the traffic through such weather as we have been having the last two weeks same as you can when it's more moderate. Anyway, there's no cars, and that's all there is to it."

"Any room in the other elevator?" I asked.

"Not much, I reckon, but you might try him," he replied.

I glanced round the little office, and noticing on some shelves bottles containing samples of grain, asked, "Do those represent the Winnipeg grades?"

"You bet," remarked the elevator boss, though I thought with rather a cynical air; and getting

up, he took down one labelled "No. 4 Northern," and compared it with my sample.

It was very much the same, and in theory the method of grading seems all right, but it may be remarked that in this matter of grading, too, the growers do not think they get fair play —that, in fact, the elevator companies work the whole system in their own interest.

However, I now set forth to try the other elevator, but found the office locked up. Seeing a man with a team crossing the track near, I asked him if he could tell me where the boss of the place was. He said he thought he was in the pool-room, so to that haunt I directed my steps, and there found a man who looked as though he might be the individual I was in search of, having a game with a much more stylishly dressed individual, who turned out to be the bank manager. Addressing the first, I remarked, in the style of the country, "Say, boss, I guess you run the elevator? If so, I wish you'd have a look at this sample, as I want to get rid of my load, if we can deal."

"Can't attend to you now," he remarked, adding: "I am not going to open the elevator till one o'clock." Knowing too much of the ways of these small towns, I forbore to express what I felt.

I would not imply that such conduct is very

common, although a man I knew of, having been so treated and being therefore unable to reach home the same evening, made complaint to the headquarters of the elevator company, but without getting practical redress.

As there was nothing to do but grin and bear it, I kicked my heels and chatted with one or two men around the hotel stove for a time, and then went across to the local store and ordered the few groceries we needed.

At length, one o'clock having arrived, the grain autocrat condescended to open his office, and having examined my sample, remarked that it was little better than pig-feed, and he could not give me more than forty-five cents a bushel; on my remarking that the man at the other elevator had said he would give fifty and that it would grade No. 4, he turned away, saying, "That's all I can do."

I do not imply that all elevator companies are like this, but it will be seen that I was practically in his hands, unless I was prepared to throw my grain by the roadside or to haul it home; and this sort of thing will serve to show one of the difficulties that face the small grower, especially in a season like the one I am describing. It is, however, fair to say, and I may refer to the matter at greater length later, that the legislatures

have made great efforts to amend the evils by a co-operative elevator scheme, of the success of which there are great hopes.

For the men who can individually or collectively load cars themselves, at least when they can get them, the case is somewhat different, and after having dinner I spent a few minutes in watching this process.

The four teams which had passed us on the way, having returned home, had now brought four more loads. As each car takes about one thousand bushels of wheat (though the larger ones take more), it will be noted that these four teams would have to make five trips to and fro in order to load a car, and assuming the distance not to exceed twelve or fourteen miles, a load can be hauled each day, so that with four teams a car may be loaded in five days, but with bad weather conditions or longer distances, the difficulties are increased, especially as after the first two or three days demurrage is charged for detention of the car.

When loaded the car is consigned to a firm of commission agents for sale and grading, though the latter operation is performed by Government agents. There are many of these firms of commission agents who advertise in the papers, and they will, if desired, advance money on receipt of the bill of lading.

A company much advertised is supposed to be more or less co-operative, at least to the extent of many farmers and growers holding shares, and for such as hold the shares it has probably done very well; but inasmuch as most of the pioneer settlers are too poor to hold shares, it is doubtful if it has helped them much, except as a powerful and keen competitor with other firms. Here, of course, we are up against the world-wide problem of securing fair value for both producer and consumer. As regards the grading, the object is of course to ensure uniform and reliable quality, in Nos. 1, 2, 3 Northern, and so on down to the poor qualities.

The same method is in operation for flax, oats, and barley, and of course the Government grade, in conjunction with the quantity and market price, gives the value of any particular car-load.

The grain for the elevator also passes through this grading process, which seems on the whole admirably arranged. Samples are taken from various parts of the car, and after being carefully examined, the grade is fixed; and though the grower is often suspicious of graft, as bribery is called, in this matter, he probably has little cause of complaint.

A car-load may be divided by a partition (erected by the shipper) and contain, say, four hundred

bushels of flax and the balance filled with wheat or oats, and so on; but in such cases there is a small deduction from the price realized by the shipper.

In shipping flax, it is needful to line the car with cloth or paper, to prevent leakage, as this grain runs almost like water, and a small hole may result in great loss as the car proceeds on its long journey. From all this it is pretty evident that those who are in a position to ship in car lots enjoy an advantage over those dependent on the elevator companies, especially as the latter are often so busy with wheat that they cannot take other grain at all. It often happens, however, that a large farmer is so fortunately placed, with his fields near the stations and elevators, and the grain is in such good condition, that he can haul it straight from the separator into the elevator. Some of the elevator companies, too, are supposed to have arrangements by which a grower can store his grain, thus waiting for a rise in price, and this may make a wonderful difference to his ultimate returns, as the price may easily rise ten or twenty cents per bushel before a new crop comes in; on the other hand, he may of course be a loser.

One thing should be very apparent from all this, namely, the importance of being near a railroad for grain growing; and this explains the

intense desire of the settler for rapid railroad construction, also the willingness of the community to make large sacrifices to obtain such facilities.

Incidentally, too, it serves to show the danger that these vast corporations may in the near future become possessed of power quite inconsistent with the welfare of the community, and by means of watered capital and other financial devices demand far too large a share of the earnings of the population in return for their admittedly great services. However, a discussion of this large question is beyond the scope of these pages.

Having cashed the cheque given me, which seemed indeed a poor return for the seed, labour, and expense spent in growing and marketing the load of wheat I had brought, I hitched up Joe and Nigger and slowly made my way towards home. But for the delay occasioned by the billiard-playing autocrat, I might have got there the same evening; as it was, I was compelled to put up for the night at the stopping-place kept by those good folks the S——'s, to whom many a traveller has had cause to feel grateful, though of course this added a moiety to the expense. They would put a settler with an empty pocket up free, but the self-respecting homesteader should not permit this unless a dire necessity.

CHAPTER X

A GRAIN GROWERS' MEETING

In the early part of December we had a beautiful spell of weather, the thermometer ranging from ten degrees below zero during the night to as much above that point during the day. While this spell lasted, the charm of the weather was almost indescribable. True, the sun rises late and sets early, and its path above the southern horizon forms but a small arc of a circle; still, while in sight it shines, and its heat and light are not obstructed by such fogs and haze, cloud and smoke, as so often hang over the Old Country when the barometer stands high in winter-time.

On one such day, Bob and Harry came along on ski, and after the usual laconic greeting had passed, Bob said:

"We want you two fellows to join our Grain Growers' Association and come to the meeting to-morrow night; the annual subscriptions are only one dollar each, and chaps like you should certainly be in with us."

"Why should we? Dollars are scarce enough with us," said Tom in reply, though I knew it was to draw Bob on; and the latter seemed to guess as much, for he answered:

"Oh, get out! You need no argument, I know, but, look here, what sense is there in nearly every galoot, from a doctor to a newsboy, combining in some way or other to protect themselves and improve their position, while the farmer, on whom they all in one sense depend, goes on ploughing and planting and seeing no danger, just like a daft ostrich with its head in the sand?"

"Oh, you get a megaphone!" said Tom; "but I guess we will come along, anyway."

"And say," said Harry, "if you see any other fellows, you might pass the word of the meeting on; it begins at eight o'clock, or should, anyway. Most of them hereabout belong to our branch, but they may not have heard."

After some more talk they went their way, and the next evening found us on our way to the meeting in the sleigh behind the oxen.

Now, I knew enough of the matter to realize the enormous importance to the prairie farmer of combination, and knowing that Tom had a bit of the prejudice so common to the individualistic and somewhat insular Britisher (though,

in fact, he had little to say on the question), I talked a bit, and what I said may prove a foreword to a short account of the meeting.

"I dare say this association business is all right, but you know the Old Country farmers never seem to hang together to much purpose," said my sturdy, practical comrade.

"True enough," I replied, and went on: "But here, you see, the farmer is under somewhat different conditions. Although he often has a mortgage and a lot of debts, both of which he has a struggle to pay off, and, alas, sometimes fails to do, yet he has no landlord in the Old-Country sense of the word."

"But," said Tom, "I thought there is a general feeling among both landlords and tenants in the Old Country that the landlord is a sort of help and protection to the tenant, and the latest talk is that he, the tenant, does not really want to be rid of his landlord."

"I guess your view of agricultural opinion in the Old Country is pretty near the mark," I said, and went on: "Don't let us get into a discussion of the great British land question, but see how it affects the combination of the farmers in their own interest. Now, I think the Canadian farmer has a better chance to combine, and will almost be forced to do so, simply because the

holding of his land is on what I will call a commercial basis, instead of a decaying feudal one. But please note, I don't offer an opinion as to which is ultimately the best, and would remark in passing that I suppose the theory of the feudal idea is that the nation's land is vested in the king as trustee for the nation, while the commercial idea is that a man owns the land he works, as he owns a horse or plough.

"Of course, there are lots of exceptions in both countries, and I am only speaking generally. In the old land, as I suggest, there only remains now a sort of semi-feudalism, under which the landlord class, holding their land traditionally from the Crown, rendered service to the State through it, and subletting, as it were, these lands, gave protection and help to their tenants, and required service for the State, through themselves and the Crown. So under the plan here, which I call the commercial system, there are exceptions, and it is doubtful to my mind whether it is practicable or beneficial in the long run for the community to permit the holding of its land as a mere chattel. However, the point I am driving at, and which I think you must see now, is that it's more easy for the farmers to combine under the latter system, and very necessary and wise for them to do so."

"Yes," said Tom; "I think I see what you mean, and am getting Canadianized, or at least seeing things a bit differently from what I used to do."

On arriving at the little white schoolhouse, we found that the stable was monopolized by the horses, but a couple of ox teams were tethered under its sheltering lee, so we also secured Joe and Nigger there, and quickly made our escape from the biting wind. The building was somewhat dimly lit by oil-lamps on the walls, but a group of men stood round the roaring stove, and the heat from it and its nearly redhot pipe, which went out through the roof, was distinctly pleasant.

The men, who had divested themselves of their furs and sheepskins, readily made room for us, and one or two whom we knew greeted us cheerily with "Good for you, boys!" and "How goes it?" and so we soon felt at home.

Close to the stove, but at the desks which nearly covered the floor of the building, sat two or three women and a couple of drowsy children, who would later on in the proceedings be rolled up in a bundle of furs and put to sleep snugly in some corner.

Though the time for beginning the meeting was long past, stragglers kept dropping in, but no one seemed in a hurry, for punctuality is not a characteristic of the prairie-folk.

Our friends from No. 9 arrived, and some one asked: "Where's the secretary?" and Sunny Jim replied, "He's coming along; Silas is sure, if he's slow," and soon after that worthy appeared.

He was an able man of business from the Old Country, but his kindness and gentleness towards his oxen made him known throughout the district as the slowest traveller on the trails.

The earnestness of these folk may be gauged from the fact that many of them had, after a day's work, travelled several miles in a biting wind with the thermometer far below zero.

The chairman was a young Englishman, who was also the local member of the municipality, and he called the meeting to order, and those present found seats at the children's desks.

Among the incidents of prairie-life it may be mentioned that the chairman's partner, another promising young Englishman, had, after consulting the doctors in Saskatoon, been advised to return to England if he wished to see his parents again, as he was suffering from some apparently incurable complaint. It was a sad blow to both men, for after working some time in Manitoba they had homesteaded together further North and made a splendid start.

The secretary having read the minutes of the last meeting, business proceeded, with some in-

terruption from a pair of quarrelsome dogs, who were summarily ejected.

It seemed that a convention was to be held in Saskatoon to consider the question of establishing an abattoir and meat-packing house there. A member of the Provincial Legislature was expected to be present, and help from that quarter was hoped for.

This is a question of much interest to the settlers, as there is a growing tendency in the direction of stock-raising; but there was a strong feeling in the meeting that if established with Government help it should be on co-operative lines, and it was eventually decided to send a delegate to represent these views.

A discussion arose as to whether the local association was yet strong enough to take advantage of the new Government co-operative elevator scheme, under which, if the grain growers of a district provide a certain small proportion of capital, the government finds the rest, leaving the management of the local elevator largely in the hands of a district committee, but it was decided that we were not strong enough for this yet.

Then the conduct of certain doctors in a neighbouring town, and of one in particular, called forth some strong comment. It seems that this

particular clique had published a notification that they would not attend certain cases (maternity ones among the rest) without either cash or a chattel mortgage, and an instance had occurred in which one of these doctors had, after about an hour's attendance, insisted on a mortgage on all the man possessed, except his pigs and children, amounting to about one hundred and thirty dollars. True, he had driven some forty miles in a motor, and the precious combine had excluded what might be called pauper cases; but few homesteaders are in that position, though such charges as the above may soon place them there.

On this point a strong resolution was passed, a copy of which it was decided to send to the Secretary of the Board of Trade of the town, the local member of the Legislature, and that excellent publication, *The Grain Growers' Guide.*

It is to be feared that these so-called Boards of Trade in small towns are often, though not invariably, associations whose main object is to "boost" real estate values; but for the doctors, it would be a mistake to think that the conduct named above is general; on the contrary, there are many noble men of the profession on the prairie, working heroically against great odds.

Another very practical subject, which was of

much interest and created a good deal of discussion, was the possibility of establishing a local co-operative store; and on this point it may be well to enlarge a little, as it is a matter that is coming very much to the front throughout the West.

The British consumer, familiar with the great system of local co-operative societies so common in the North of our island, with their vast wholesale trading and manufacturing organization, and with Army and Navy Stores, Civil Service Stores, and the huge cash-trade concerns, can hardly realize the state of things in Western Canada, where petty credit with cumulative evils seems to be the normal condition.

Now, I am, in the following remarks, far from making an attack on the storekeepers (i.e. shopkeepers). Like most of those with whom they do business, they are worthy people, though out for what they can get; but the shortage of ready money in newly settled districts, while it makes the population often indebted to them for kindly assistance to tide over a bad time, of course places the community at their mercy as to charges far too much. I am aware this matter may seem very dry and commonplace, but as I want to give a true idea of the pioneer settler's life, I must ask the reader's kind patience.

In most of the smaller towns there is very little competition, and yet, though their population may not exceed fifty to a hundred, the amount of business done may be enormous, as they may be the supply points for a district fifty or more miles on each side of the line of railroad. Then it must be remembered that the inhabitants of such a district are for the most part neither wage-earners nor people living genteelly on their means, but hard-working folk who want all sorts of commodities for their farms and homesteads, whether the crops on these fail or not.

Under the conditions that prevail, it would appear to be almost impossible for the ordinary small storekeeper to make any great difference between his cash and credit customers. The storekeeper has, of course, to face long-outstanding credit and bad and doubtful debts, and were he able to work a genuine cash system in favour of those who are getting on a bit and able to pay, the difference in prices would probably be so startling as to prove a terrible shock to his poor credit customers. In a rough sort of way there may seem some justice in the bachelor who successfully harvests a hundred acres of good wheat having to pay towards helping the man who has a family dependent on him round a bad corner, but human nature being what it

is, naturally those who are able to pay cash resent an extra charge of perhaps 30 or 40 per cent. Such prices may seem extraordinary, but on one occasion we needed some horse-blankets, and found the price in a small town nearly double that of a wholesale house whose list we had, and from whom we eventually got them indirectly.

There is, of course, the great Eaton's, already mentioned, but it is a long way off, and there is often much delay in getting goods. A catalogue, the commonest book in many a prairie shack, shows pretty conclusively the great gain there is to the fortunate cash buyer.

To add to the difficulties of the man who, having worked hard, wants to lay out his money to the best advantage, there is, perhaps, a not unnatural tendency to boycott the buyer from Eaton's or other cash sources of supply.

There is, in fact, a good deal of combination between retailers and wholesale houses, and in the network of financial interests and agencies connected with the implement manufacturers, which makes it difficult for the man with capital who wishes to farm, or the hard-working pioneer with cash, to buy to the best advantage. The incubus of the middleman is not unfelt in British agriculture, but in the Prairie Provinces it is

hardly too much to say that many of the more intelligent of the tillers of the soil have a feeling that there is a combination of interests to keep them poor and exploit them for the benefit of those interests.

A discussion of Canadian politics is quite outside the design of these pages, and the Grain Growers' Association is supposed to be non-political; but to understand the position of those who by hard toil and endurance are turning great stretches of country into productive farms, a few words on their views seem needful, and may be helpful.

Such men may call themselves Liberals or Conservatives, followers of Sir Robert Borden or Sir Wilfrid Laurier, but they are probably united in a feeling that the Prairie Provinces are not getting fair play from the Eastern Provinces. This is perhaps natural, as so many of the manufactories are in the East, also the banks and other financial agencies (though much of the capital in the first place is supplied from abroad). It is, of course, an old story, and not unknown in the United States, but, unlike the case of the latter, Canada has an enormous tract of what may prove almost unimprovable country separating her prairies from her East.

Through this desolate region run at present

only two lines of rail, and though there is of course the great water route through the lakes, this is only open in the summer and autumn months, and under such circumstances it is not to be wondered at that the products of the Eastern factories arrive in the West considerably enhanced in price. Then, while I have no desire to discuss the question of Free Trade or Protection, it can hardly be denied that the tariff compels the prairie farmer to pay unnaturally high prices for the goods he wants, without — so far, at least—yielding him any corresponding benefit.

The splendid soil, with land to be had cheaply (if not free, for much of the latter has been taken up), tempts many enterprising and energetic citizens of the United States, who make some of the best settlers. I believe they come prepared to be loyal Canadian citizens, and have no objection to the British Union Jack; but, coming from places nearer the manufacturing centres of the Middle West (as, indeed, the Canadian prairies also are), they, in common with British, Scandinavians, and other nationalities, resent being dependent on Eastern Canada for their supplies.

The whole subject is an interesting one, worthy of careful thought, but is mentioned here to show some of the reasons why our local association

was discussing whether it could not do something to enable its members to get better value for their ready money.

"It's no use blinking facts," said Bob, and went on: "We may call ourselves farmers, but many of our farms are mortgaged heavily, and after a season like this there are our debts at big interest eating us out, and then the principal to be paid off. I'm no knocker—the country is right enough; but it is not good enough for us fellows to put in the best years of our lives digging out stones and breaking up the prairie, and then, when we are worn out, see a lot of other fellows come in and scoop the lot. It's my opinion, if we are going to stop this, we'll have to get a move on and help ourselves somehow. Of course, we want money to do any good, and I know we have not got much, but if we can only raise a few dollars we can make a start, and it may grow."

Some one asked, "Suppose we had the dollars, who will take on the store?"

Several more spoke in favour of the scheme, and at length Mr. Balham, who hailed from Lincolnshire, in the Old Country, and lived with his wife and family near the schoolhouse, said: "I've seen a bit of co-operation in the Old Country, and I know it's a good thing for the poor man.

If some money can be raised and a society formed, and they like to trust the missus and me, we'll do our best for a start. You know our shack is only a little place, but we could make out for a start."

All knew Balham, and his offer was received with acclamation, for, as Sunny Jim remarked, "One volunteer was worth two pressed men, and here was Mrs. Balham, too, which was best of all."

So a resolution was carried that a society be formed, and before the meeting separated, twenty dollars in dollar shares had been subscribed.

It was now past midnight, and by the time some of those present reached their homes, it would be nearly time to begin the morning's chores; but there were many cheery "So longs" as the little company issued forth to hitch up their teams in the icy wind, with the thermometer below zero by many degrees.

CHAPTER XI

WINTER FESTIVITIES

THE sun had nearly reached its southern limit, and the ordinary chores, together with hauling firewood and bucking and splitting it, occupied a considerable part of the short winter day. It is well to keep plenty of firewood split, not only for winter use, but to avoid having to do it during the summer, when every hour is valuable on the land.

The "Canadian fiddle," as the bucksaw is sometimes called, is a capital tool for sawing into lengths, and it is matter for surprise it is not more used in Britain. A thin steel saw-blade is kept in tension by means of a frame and tension screws, and Tom's strong arms and powerful frame found healthy exercise in driving it through the poplar logs, cutting them into some fifteen-inch lengths, which he then split with the axe, in the use of which implement he had now acquired considerable efficiency, and rather prided himself on being able once in a while to

split a match. I occupied myself with cooking, baking, washing, and in many other ways. We could not afford the luxury of a heater, which would have kept in all night and have maintained our shack at a moderate temperature. Our cooker, however, baked our bread well, and served to keep us warm while it was under way, and if our breath did freeze on our blankets, we were usually snug when between them.

Dances at one or other of the neighbouring schoolhouses were of common occurrence, and on such occasions the company would assemble early in the evening dressed in their Sunday best, and coming with teams from far and near, as to the grain growers' meeting. Naturally there was a greater proportion of women than at the former gathering, and with them came the children; and as such festivities are usually kept up all night, a sort of common bed of furs, coats, and wraps is made up for the youngsters in a quiet corner. Sometimes such a dance is given by a newly married couple, who are "shivareed" (ragged) into it, sometimes by a bachelor, and a distinctive feature of a Canadian dance is the calling-off. The caller-off is a sort of master of the ceremonies, and should have a good voice and a turn for humorous impromptu recitation. A really good caller-off adds immensely to the go of square

dances, announcing the successive movements by such expressions as "Ladies, cross your lily-white hands and gents your black and tan," and so forth.

Then there was a concert got up to help a poor neighbour, and the amount of talent, vocal and instrumental, which some districts can produce on occasion is amazing. A "box social," too, was held at a neighbouring schoolhouse to raise money for the erection of a stable as an adjunct to the school-building. For this function a number of boxes of dainty provisions are prepared by ladies; these boxes are prettily decorated, and then sold to the men by auction, the purchaser of each box gaining thereby the privilege of enjoying its contents with the lady who has prepared it. Bob, who seemed more intent on raising money for the stable than on taking supper with any particular fair one, bought one box for which there was keen competition, and then resold it at a handsome advance, making his excuse to the fair provider of the feast that it was all in a good cause. Large sums may often be raised in this way, and on the present occasion the auction produced about sixty dollars, which was very welcome towards the expense of building the stable.

One night a little bunch of us paid a surprise

BEGINNING A LARGE STABLE

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visit to an elderly couple who were returning to the Old Country after a stay with their sons. The good lady was quite a blessing to the boys while with them; she cooked, washed, baked, and made butter, and the old man used to do some little chores around, such as riding or driving for the mail, helping with the hay, bucking a bit of wood, and so on, and, what he detested, as most people do, carrying water in buckets.

Few dwellers on the prairie love chores, and they are apt to fall to the lot of the young or the old, to those who are ambitious to be doing more, as ploughing or driving a binder all day, or to the older, who are apt to look back with regret for the things they have done in the world.

I think this particular couple had come out to visit their people with some idea of renewing their youth on the land, as they had both been accustomed to farming and a country life in the Old Country in their younger days, like so many who during the Victorian times drifted into the cities.

A good many middle-aged or elderly folk have, in fact, followed some of the younger generation to the West with similar ideas, and many will doubtless lay their bones there; but it must be recognized that this great new land is a young people's country.

It is for the young, strong, and hardy to develop her splendid natural resources, to build her great cities and railroads, to clear her great forests, to plant her fruit ranches, and to reduce her vast areas of fertile land to cultivation.

So it proved in this case; and the old man's sight having failed, they had decided to go home, and, actuated by kindly feeling, the neighbours determined to give them a surprise party as a send-off. Something of it must have leaked out, for the boys had got the stable ready, and when the folks assembled it was possible to house ten horses. The party numbered twenty-six, all told, and the visitors had brought some food with them to save their hosts needless trouble. They also brought two violins and a cornet, and we soon began to spend a very pleasant evening, and later a few kindly speeches were made, showing that if the weather outside were cold, the visitors had warm hearts and very kindly feelings towards the Old-Country couple who had for a short time been sojourners among them. Then came supper, and the company began to think of dispersing; but the weather had become worse, with howling wind and falling snow, and under such conditions, at night, travel across the prairie is dangerous, so, as the house was small, the children were safely put to bed and the party prepared

for a night of gaiety. The table was unceremoniously turned out and a dance organized, and then followed songs, recitations, and step dances. It was astonishing how the hours sped away, and the old couple declared that they should look back with great pleasure to the surprise party.

Christmas, too, that season of peace on earth, goodwill, and general rejoicing throughout Christendom, was now upon us, and before describing our Christmas dinner it would seem fitting to make some reference to what may be called the spiritual life of the prairie.

It may be frankly confessed at once that in the conventional sense, at any rate, this is at a low ebb. I am aware of the noble and self-denying labours of many men sent out under the auspices of the Archbishops' fund, as described in "The Open Door," by Mr. Bickersteth, also of the zealous work of those who may be termed the apostles of the older Faith among the Indians and others, and also of the strong efforts put forth by various other denominations; but the fact remains that settlement has run as far ahead of the conventional work of the Churches as it has of railroads. Besides this, the mere material pressure, the continual call for arduous and exacting labour in the subjugation of the new land, leaves little time for ordinary religious observances.

All this may not be without great good in the future, for there must be many faithful hearts who, through the dearth of time-honoured religious observances, may realize a deeper spiritual religion. This may bear noble fruit in time to come, especially if it helps those who experience it to see that the essence of Christianity does not consist so much in building beautiful churches and in paying good salaries to popular preachers as in doing justly and loving mercy; in fact, the opposite of that mere materialism which is so rampant.

It is only fair to add that among the settlers there is (apart from religious profession, and in spite of some littleness) very much of that spirit of mutual helpfulness and goodwill towards each other which is surely of the very alphabet of Christianity, and one longs that in this great new nation this spirit should permeate the Churches, and through them the State.

Tom and I were invited to eat our Christmas dinner with a family who lived some five miles away to the north-west, so, having fed and watered our stock, we set forth early in the day, not forgetting to take with us a turkey which we had procured, to help out the feast. The day proved fine, though there was a bitter wind, but our faithful bulls went cheerily along, and there was

quite a festive feeling in the air as we crossed the frozen lake, thick enough now to bear three times the weight of our team and bob-sleigh. Thence we wound up among the hills and in and out among the bluffs, which stood dark against the snow, with such brown, withered leaves as remained rustling in the icy blast which swept across the wide expanse of rolling hill and dale. Here and there we passed a settler's sod-lined shack, with a thin wreath of smoke blowing away from the bit of stove-pipe protruding from the roof, which told us the Christmas dinner, even if only consisting of a bit of pork, was cooking inside. Most of the occupants were known to us, and had we noticed one which we knew to be occupied without smoke, we should have made a point of investigating further; for, as many settlers live alone at considerable distances from neighbours, such a one may easily be lying injured or ill, and lack of smoke may be a sign that this is so.

Arrived at our friend's house, we found a jolly party gathered, including several women and children, the former busy with preparations for the feast, while the men smoked and discussed one another's stock, or politics all the world over; for in the cosmopolitan population that prevails, talk is apt to range over a very wide area. One

thing is rather noticeable at such times, viz. that as many have left older countries some time, they are prone to think of them as they knew them; and as we were on this occasion largely drawn from Britain, it was not easy for men who had left the old land some ten or fifteen years to realize that great changes had taken place there within that time, not only in political matters, but even in the ways of the people.

Presently we all lent a hand to turn the little living-room of the shack into a banqueting-hall for the fifteen to eighteen guests gathered there. Needless to add that the turkey, chickens, roast beef, and plum-puddings disappeared with marvellous celerity. During the short afternoon, and while the ladies were clearing away the wreck of the feast, some sport on ski was enjoyed, and later came another famous meal in the shape of supper, which was followed by a jolly evening, during which we enjoyed songs, stories, conjuring, and thought-reading, and similar social pastimes. As the hour drew towards midnight we broke up, and wrapping ourselves up well, took the trail for home. It was a brilliant night, one of those glorious occasions when the moon and starlight, combined with the snow, create a glow whose peculiar radiance and softness made the trip one to be remembered in spite of the intense cold.

Arrived at home, a capital fire was soon roaring in the stove, and we ended a memorable Christmas Day by speedily rolling ourselves into our blankets and sinking into forgetfulness even of the glorious dinner we had partaken of; for be it remembered that the enjoyment of an elaborate dinner is an epoch-making event in the life of many a lonely settler.

Here is an extract from a letter of Bob's to his people in the Old Country with which the writer was good enough to favour me: "We have been having a lovely time two nights running, one at H—— G——'s and the next at E—— G——'s. We have had a simply lovely Christmas. I thought of all you people at home, and hoped you were having as good a time as we were. We had everything Christmassy and jolly—gramophone and organ, games, lots of fruit, the table groaning at the beginning of a meal, and the people sighing with satisfaction at the end."

Nor should it be forgotten that in nearly every little white schoolhouse on the prairie a good Christmas-tree is provided for the children, and some old settler, decked out as Santa Claus for the occasion, delights a lively and appreciative gathering of youngsters.

CHAPTER XII

WOMEN ON THE PRAIRIE

Tom, I knew, kept up a correspondence with a certain young lady who lived near his old home, and, as is so apt to be the case, the fact leaked out among our youthful friends and neighbours, and this led to a certain amount of good-natured banter. Nor was he the only youthful bachelor among our little "bunch" of neighbours who was suspected of an ambition to grace his homestead with a fair partner, and now and then, as we gathered round the stove in each other's shacks, the chaff and jocular allusions would take a more serious turn as to the real difficulties attendant on bringing women, and especially young wives, to the prairie.

We had a few women neighbours, but for the most part they had been married before being transplanted, and whatever their private opinion of the life might be, they were loyal helpmates of their husbands, and it may truthfully be said that the country-side was the better for their presence.

A PRAIRIE HOMESTEAD.

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One would meet them trudging alone over the prairie, hunting among the bluffs for stray cattle, or see them helping their husbands to dig out stones, or mounted on a plough or disc driving a team of bulls, or hear tales of how they had helped their husbands to dig wells or build the little shack. In some cases they would hold down the homestead with two or three young children while the husband was earning money (getting a "grub stake," as it is called), or even go out themselves to do the same as cooks while their husbands performed the homestead duties. So, as a rule, whether gentle or simple, from educated, refined homes or more humble surroundings, for the most part they played their part bravely and cheerfully in the new life. Most of the younger generation were very young, and though a young girl may willingly enough lend a hand on the homestead up to a certain age, and even find delight in the care of the young animals rapidly growing up, and in driving and riding, it is to be feared that there comes a time when she is apt to look with disfavour on the environment of the prairie homestead. This is probably still more the case with the town-bred maiden, and even more so with those from the cities of Eastern Canada and the States than such as come from the older lands.

Perhaps it is not to be wondered at, when one considers many of the attractions of city-life, in comparison, especially, with that of pioneer farming, with its incessant and strenuous toil and liability to financial disappointment. There would seem to be a tendency to look with disfavour upon what should surely be the noble employment of agriculture. If all this is true (and I fear it is), it is surely a very serious matter for Canada, whose future prosperity lies in the development of her agricultural resources, which thousands and thousands of young men are striving hard to effect, living and cooking meanwhile for themselves in lonely shacks—in fact "baching," as the expressive term has it.

It must, however, be admitted that in the early stages of settlement there is a good deal to be said on behalf of girls who refuse to become the wife of a pioneer settler, and there was justification for the remark made by the practical if taciturn Harry at one of our informal discussions, to the effect that he would not care to bring a wife on to his homestead until things were very different from what they were.

To this Bob replied, in his hopeful way, "You forget, Harry, how quickly things are changing; we shall soon have the railroad within twelve miles, and in a year or two we should have tele-

phones, and if we could get a couple of good harvests, folks would begin putting up good frame-houses, with hot-air heating systems, and perhaps oil-gas lighting."

"I guess we want good barns first," said a more pessimistic speaker.

"When I want a wife," remarked Sunny Jim, with youthful ardour, "I guess she's coming, house or no house."

"It's all very well talking," said one of the older men present, "but in my opinion, what the Government should have done, when they set aside land for education, was to make grants for the provision of medieal and nursing facilities."

"Reckon they thought the women that were coming out here were just like cattle," said another; "maybe women's votes would teach 'em different."

"I met a man in Saskatoon," said the former speaker, "who called himself a medical man; he allowed that the folks out here are of little account, and must be prepared to die. They 'come from hell and nowhere,' was the way he put it."

"He can't have had much sense, anyway," remarked Bob; "they are some of the salt of the earth, and he was too thick to see it. Besides," he went on, "I guess he was one of those

bounders who are a disgrace to a noble profession, and think a lot more of dollars than duty. We know they are not all like that. There is our own Dr. S——, in M——; he'd go through a lot of weather to help folk that needed it, and wait for his money, too."

"But a doctor ought to be reasonably paid, like any one else," said Harry.

"Of course he should," said the older man, "but those folks at Ottawa are too busy helping the boomsters and ladling out dollars to special interests to consider the proper business of government. It's funny to read in travellers' tales about the immigration halls, and the care that is taken of the incoming colonist, his wife, and children. Why don't some of these 'Imperial Limited' travellers go into the back-block homesteads with a team of bulls and see how it fares with the women and children there?"

"Ha, ha!" said Bob; "'Imperial Limited,' that's a good name for some of those travellers. It just hits them off. But the country is all right, eh?"

"Oh yes, the country is all right. What I say is, that with a bit more foresight this settling up of what the boomsters are so fond of calling the last best West might have been a much more satisfactory proposition."

"Some of the women want the Government to let them homesteads for themselves, don't they?" said Tom.

"I wish they'd homestead here," remarked the Sunny one, "and take summer boarders; they'd get me. I'm sick of cooking, washing, and baking. Oh, lots of 'em don't want that job, and don't know how to do it either, if they did; but I think," he went on, "that idea of women homesteading might have worked all right had it been organized under suitable conditions; for instance, what would be wrong if two sisters of a married couple took up an adjoining homestead for dairying?"

"That's so," said Bob; "here's a lot of us trying to grow grain, running into debt for implements and taking it out of the land, and the Prairie Provinces importing tons of butter and eggs."

So the desultory conversation ran on, and here a few explanatory words may not be amiss on the subject of women on the prairie.

It will be evident to the reader that the conditions of an unmarried woman, or a middle-aged matron, and that of a young wife bearing and rearing a family, are radically different. Now, the ideal of the Canadian Government seems to be a vast number of men owning small farms,

with wives of the latter class, and yet they have made no adequate provision for such. In all communities whose governments claim to be at all up to date, the care of mothers and children and what is called eugenics are receiving more and more attention; but the Canadian Government, while receiving a splendid influx of new life from the older countries, would seem to consider that the gift of a hundred and sixty acres of land covers a multitude of omissions in this respect. Terrible stories of hardship and suffering could be multiplied over and over again, and readers who want to know more on this point may be referred to an interesting tale called "A White Passion," by A. Teetgen (published by Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., Ltd., London).

A very common practice in maternity cases is for a woman who expects to become a mother to go to a nursing home in a neighbouring town. This will undoubtedly seem to be the best plan in most cases at present, for the conditions in a vast majority of the little prairie shacks are such as to render impossible the proper attention and care needed at such a time. It must, however, be remembered that this involves expense, and usually pre-arrangement, and often much anxiety, as the distances are generally great, over rough roads, and there are often many cases

where such arrangement is out of the question. In case of war involving what may be called a civilized nation, the people are aroused, and great efforts are put forth to mitigate suffering; but it may well be questioned whether, in the settling up of the Prairie Provinces, there has not been far more suffering entailed, especially on women and children, than that of a great war; and, alas! is still going on, and will continue for many years, unless a determined effort is put forth to stop it. The settlers themselves are, for the most part, well aware of the evil, and willing to make sacrifices, but they are usually very short of ready money, and as yet have little political power, as Eastern Canada and the financial interests dominate the situation at present.

I am aware that many worthy efforts have been made to improve the existing state of things; there is the Victorian Order of Nurses, with its headquarters at Ottawa, and the authorities of the Archbishops' fund have at least one cottage hospital, and as examples of what might be done they are doubtless excellent, but it is to be feared that the vast majority of settlers have never heard of them.

Though the predominant population is composed of young men "baching" it, yet a considerable number of what may be described as

well brought up young women, and some from homes of refinement and education in the Motherland, follow the men of their choice to the prairie country. Now, this is a class of women that Canada stands sorely in need of, though the Canadian worshipper of the Goddess of Getting On may not realize the fact. It is true that a considerable number of single women find employment in the towns, who shrink from becoming wives and mothers on the prairie under present conditions; and without attempting to go into details or to elaborate the question, the thoughtful reader will easily perceive that such a state of things is not a healthy one for the future of the growing young nation.

Mr. G. Fox Smith, in his interesting, if somewhat doleful story of "The City of Hope" (Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., London), has drawn a picture well calculated to bring home to his readers the dangers that exist.

"But," it may be asked, "what would you have? Canada is a free country, with democratic institutions, whose object is to let the people rectify evils themselves, and how can Government help?"

True, but it is just in that plastic state when public opinion is especially needed to mould it, and that must be my excuse for offering a few

suggestions. The conditions in the Prairie Provinces are much the same, but as I am writing of Saskatchewan, I will suggest that province setting an example; and would it not be well for her Legislature to appoint a small committee, quite outside Parliament, composed, say, of three public-spirited women interested in the matter and two men, one of whom might be a medical man? One of the ladies might act as secretary, and the objects of the commission should be to inquire into and report as soon as possible on the following points:

1. What can be done to supply adequate medical and nursing facilities (especially in maternity cases) for all districts surveyed and thrown open for homestead settlement within the last fifteen years.

2. What State property there is available in conjunction with local taxation which could be used for this purpose.

3. The practical machinery for carrying the report into effect.

Such a committee should have power to co-opt members, say from one to five or seven, in odd numbers, and replace in case of the death of a member or inability to serve from any cause.

It should not confine its deliberations to Regina, but should, I think, after obtaining suggestions

and information from grain growers and farmers' associations and school trustees, either separately or in groups, visit some at least of the districts. My own feeling is that the machinery should work in connection with the schools. It seems to me that, on the whole, the population have worked the School Act well, and had the necessary machinery for nursing and medical purposes been incorporated in the School Act, they would have worked that equally well too, and not only saved enormous loss of life and suffering, but incidentally this would have proved a much more satisfactory advertisement, and one more tempting to the better class of emigrant, than so much mere booming literature.

In the district of which I am writing there are within a radius of about ten miles five schoolhouses, which should mean at least fifty children, yet there is no doctor or regular nurse within twenty miles or more of the centre.

The presence of these schoolhouses is pretty clear evidence of a considerable amount of public spirit among the people, as the trustees are unpaid and a part at least of the expense is raised by local taxation.

The schoolhouses, too, are often the centres of a healthy social life, and it does seem to me that, with some Government help and encour-

agement, groups of them might be organized in such a way as to be of immense benefit from the nursing and medical point of view.

Much has been said about telephones, and doubtless in some districts much has been done with great advantage to the dwellers therein; and, though I cannot speak with intimate knowledge on the matter, there seems a laudable desire that this great boon should be extended to every farmhouse as soon as possible, and I believe there are some districts where this is the case. But it seems to me there are many districts where all reasonable immediate requirements would be met were the telephone carried to the post offices, and that this should be done without further delay. The difference between having to go or send from two to five miles to get into touch with a doctor or nurse and anything from ten to fifty is too obvious to need further mention, while from a mere business point of view the saving of time would be immense.

One need only mention the necessity that often arises of finding out if a parcel of goods or a machine has arrived at a station, or if a spare part of some broken implement has arrived or is in stock, to illustrate the terrible waste of time that often occurs in driving long distances

and waiting about, coupled with the temptation to drink and waste money as well as time. A threshing gang may be held up for days during the short threshing season when by the aid of the telephone a breakdown could be put right in a few hours.

All this may seem very discouraging to a young wife who contemplates making a home on a farm in the New West—at least on a homestead in a newly settled district; and there is no doubt that for such it is a very serious business; but for the healthy, strong woman, young or in the prime of life, who loves a country-life, and rejoices in the care of animals, but with no inclination towards matrimony, I really do not think the same disability applies, and in the next chapter I hope to show that there are abundant openings for such, or at least that such may find opportunities for a life of independence they would look in vain for in the Old Country, and under such circumstances, if matrimony comes, well, they may enter that blessed state with their eyes open.

That there are men in the Provincial Legislatures who recognize that all is not well as things are, may be seen from the following extracts from an open letter from the Hon. George Langley, of Saskatchewan, Minister of Municipalities. The letter was in reply to one asking

READY FOR A "JOY RIDE."

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his comment on a scheme to get a million immigrants a year for the next ten years, and was published in *The Grain Growers' Guide* of May 13, 1914. "In my judgment the settlement of Western Canada during the last ten or twelve years has been sufficiently rapid, and this applies especially to Saskatchewan. . . . I am not sure that a slight check for a while is not desirable." "It seems to me important for us to make sure we are treating those who are already here as well as they should be treated, before we allow ourselves to become inflamed with any such desire as you formulate in your proposal. Before all things, it is our duty to make residence on the land more attractive than it is at the present time."

CHAPTER XIII

HORSE AND STOCK RAISING

I HOPE no fair reader who honours me by a perusal of these pages will feel aggrieved by my saying that the heading of this chapter instinctively appears akin in my mind with that of the last, viz. "Women on the Prairie."

If a woman's noblest duties are those connected with motherhood and the rearing of a native-born population, both in a spiritual and material sense, for the great New West, this may not be the lot of all, and it seems to me the mother-instinct may also find scope, and very worthy scope, in helping the men in rearing the farm animal life for which the vast stretches of country are so well fitted. Let us hear a few remarks from these men on the subject of horse and cattle raising.

The winter was getting along pretty well, though we had had some snaps of intense cold. Once the spirit in the thermometer had touched fifty-five degrees below zero, and on several occasions the

HORSES ROUND A SMUDGE.

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top of the spirit was not much above forty below, and such temperatures made us realize that we were best indoors. If one stepped outside the shack on such occasions in cloth clothes and there happened to be a wind, it seemed to reach the skin like a touch of ice.

One evening in late February, during a somewhat less cold spell, we were sitting round the stove in the comfortable little house of our friends the three cousins, when Bob remarked: "Well, after last season I am more than ever convinced that we want more stock as a set-off to these crop failures."

"But," said Harry, "how is a settler about here to get stock to make a start? If he starts in to grow grain he can get implements on credit, and one or two good crops make him all right; but to get a decent herd of stock together is a very different proposition."

"That," replied Bob, "is just where a lot of fellows have made the mistake. They get a little money together somehow, get on a homestead, and start in on the wheat proposition, and with a harvest or two like the last they are in 'Queer Street,' what with their debts and the high interest. Now, suppose, instead of buying oxen or horses and running into debt for implements, they had put their money into eight or

ten heifers and steers, wouldn't they be a lot better off ? "

" They might do a lot better than that," said an older man, whose forbears evidently hailed from the Emerald Isle ; " they might buy two or three good milkers, and if they had wives who could make good butter, would have a living right away, and by working their stock right, could have a lot of young heifers coming on soon."

" That's the ticket—start a creamery," said Sunny Jim ; and Tom and I pricked up our ears to hear how this suggestion was received.

Silence, however, followed for a minute or so, until Tom asked, " Don't the Government help in starting a creamery ? "

" I think they do give some assistance," said Bob, " but I guess we are not far along enough yet ; in the first place, we have not nearly sufficient milking-cows in the district to provide a large enough supply of cream all the year round ; and then there is the question of winter feed. Prairie hay and straw are all very well up to a certain point, but for supplying a creamery you want succulent food and silos for storing it, and there are lots of difficulties ; rearing stock for the market is the thing at present."

" Oh yes," said Harry, " but look at the time you have to wait for any return."

"Well," remarked another man, "the financial magnates who are always wanting to help the farmer so they can rob him tell us we ought to go in for butter, hogs, and poultry."

"I came in to grow wheat," said Harry, "and if I can't do that, I'm going out."

"You'll grow plenty of wheat if you'll have a little patience," said the older man with the Hibernian accent; "I've seen this sort of thing in Dakota, and other places; folks will begin to get one or two beasts and manage to hold on to the heifers, and by and by you'll see a fine lot of stock in this country, as well as plenty of wheat and other grain being grown, because, don't you see, one thing helps the other. Suppose," he went on, "we get a lot of frozen wheat, same as last year, we ought to have a lot of hogs coming on, and we should make as good money as off a good harvest."

"I reckon," said Fred, "the sheriff got hold of a lot of them fellows down in Dakota before they got to the hog stage, eh, Pat?"

"Oh, not so many as you might think," answered Pat; "there were a few dropped out, of course," and went on: "You boys and one or two other fellows around have got hold of some nice mares, and I tell you there is money in them. Here horses are selling well, and in a

few years there will be lots of horses wanted, you'll see."

In such wise, and with far more detail, do settlers and those connected with the future of the Prairie Provinces discuss the question of horses, cattle, and grain—of the former two versus the latter. Newspapers, too, and such authors as write books, fiction or otherwise, with a knowledge of the situation, dwell more or less on the subject of mixed farming. Yet it must be obvious that for most settlers both time and capital are needed before they can expect much return from stock. I believe that during 1914 the duties on live-stock entering the United States from Canada were either much reduced or entirely removed; prices of Canadian stock rose accordingly, and a great cry went up that the country was being depleted of what cattle it had, and farmers were strongly advised to hold on to their cattle; but it did not appear that the people who raised the cry were prepared to do much to help the farmer and settler to this desirable end. In many cases he had a beast or two ready for the market, and as he wanted money, the best course for him was to sell at the enhanced price, though, naturally, he would hold on to cows, heifers, and young stock if he could afford to do so. The subject is, of course, of much importance, and a few

general remarks on the situation as it appears to the writer may be of interest to the reader.

The young settler coming from one of the older countries to take up his abode on his homestead will probably note depressions similar to small ponds, though they may be dry unless the weather is wet, or if the land is snow-covered he may find one by a capsize of his sleigh. He may also notice deep paths leading down to the sloughs The former, he will be told, are buffalo wallows, and the latter their trails, from which he will naturally conclude that he is the first to make any profitable use of the land since the Hudson Bay Company, and the Indians, with the buffaloes and other wild animals, held undisputed sway. Before many months have passed he will probably hear of two or three old-timers in the district—not men who came in with the railroad five or six years before, but men who had been in the neighbourhood twenty or thirty years. These may be men with families, and he may even hear of a lonely elderly woman who has lost her husband. As time goes on he will learn that these folks were ranchers—not as a rule men owning thousands of head of stock and employing many cowboys, as on the foot-hills of the Rockies, though here and there may have been a man in a big way, but owners of perhaps from

two to five hundred head. He will then soon realize that, prior to the surveying of the country for homesteading and the coming of the settler proper, there was much stock raised, and some wonderfully fine stock, too. Joe and Nigger had, in fact, come originally from such a man. With the coming of the grain grower, however, it soon became evident that the small rancher must either change his method or go further back; a few have homesteaded, and some have followed the other alternative.

From all this it will be seen that even a new country has passed and is passing through different phases.

After what has been previously said, it is hardly necessary to point out that the vast stretch of country which is known as the Prairie Provinces varies very much in different parts and in many ways. Enormous numbers of people, either for business or pleasure, have passed over the great east and west route of the Canadian Pacific during the last thirty years, and probably most of such travellers, whose survey has been limited to such a journey, imagine that they have a pretty fair idea of what the rest of the Prairie Provinces are like; but any such idea is calculated to give a totally wrong impression. The late Sir William Butler, writing some forty years ago

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n that fine book "The Great Lone Land," and eferring to the Saskatchewan country, i.e. the alleys of the rivers, uses such words as these : Northward lies a forest, southward a desert, hile to the eastward is a great swamp," and nen goes on to speak in very high terms of ne part he is referring to; and it would appear nat the C.P.R., as the Canadian Pacific is famiarly called, was originally planned to run through nis country, but for what are known as strategic easons was carried further south, nearer the Jnited States border.

Of course, all this is ancient history now, and ne C.N.R., the G.T.P., and branches of the C.P.R. re now running through the country further orth ; but it may just serve to remind travellers ver the old transcontinental that they have ot seen much of the best part of the prairie.

Not only are there great differences of soil nd climatic variations, but certain localities seem o have special characteristics. There is, for nstance, a district just east of Last Mountain, r Long Lake, which hardly ever suffers from ost, possibly because the deep depression of he lake catches and holds the cold north-west inds or light airs during those dangerous autumn ights when the frost spirit is apt to be so estructive. Such places and the great Regina

Plains (the latter after vicissitudes) seemed s profitable for grain growing, that it is not wonder ful if the new settlers, who in recent years hav been pouring in north-westwards, should hav striven to follow on the same lines, forgettin that not only were they further from the world' markets, but that their country was practicall untried.

Not that from climatic conditions or othe causes the particular district of which I an speaking and similar great stretches of countr in Northern Saskatchewan and Alberta are un suited for the growth of grain; in fact, I believ samples of wheat from one of the parts name have taken the world's prize at a recent larg exhibition. The country, however, appears t be less uniform, needing more knowledge an experience, while the settlers that have bee pouring in have, perhaps, had less than som of those who came to places like the Regin Plains and some other parts. From this an causes before mentioned, there have been muc discouragement and disappointment among man who have toiled on year after year courageousl hoping for better times. On the other hand ranchers, who are being more or less crowde out, and for the most part live in an exceedingl primitive way, have been doing pretty well, an

are shipping lots of cattle still. It would seem evident, too, from the railroad returns, that stock comes in much greater proportion in comparison with grain from the Canadian Northern system than from the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that many should say "This is a cattle country," and that in many districts there is considerable discussion on the question as to whether it is best to adopt what is known as "Herd Law" or "Fence Law." With the former, it may be explained that the fields of grain are not fenced, and the man who owns horses and stock is supposed to keep them in a pasture, or to have some one in charge to herd them, while under the latter the crops are fenced and the cattle and horses range at large over the uncultivated parts of the prairie. Now, in the particular district of which I am writing, as has been previously stated, a great many of the alternate sections are still held by the C.P.R. at comparatively high prices, from eleven to seventeen dollars an acre, quite beyond the reach of the average homesteader. Besides these, there are many quarters of sections which have been homesteaded by men who are known as speculators, i.e. men who have just homesteaded their land, or commenced to do so, for sale, and only hold it till

they can get a purchaser. These unoccupied spaces of open prairie are a source of trouble and anxiety to the genuine settler as breeding places for the destructive gopher, and from the danger of fire; on the other hand, they provide hay and keep for almost any amount of stock he can manage to get together, so it is only natural that with poor crop returns he should turn his attention in the direction of horses, cattle, and hogs. Some reader may say, "Why not sheep?" and, in truth, there would not seem to be any very good reason against them, and many in favour of keeping them, and I met one man who was trying them with considerable success, he said. Their help in keeping down weeds might be very great, but there are still many coyotes about in most districts, and it is to be feared that many of the dogs partake of the same nature as the prairie wolf, as far as sheep are concerned; at any rate, the fact remains that there are very few sheep kept.

From the foregoing remarks it will be apparent that, at least in the district referred to, there is but little mixed farming in the British sense of the word. Here and there bachelors like Tom and myself milk a cow and make a little butter for themselves, or a man blessed with a wife may have two or three, and exchange the butter they

do not require at the local store, if there is one, or sell to those who are "baching" it; and yet Canada is said to import much butter, and the article from far New Zealand is sold in parts of British Columbia as high as ninety cents per pound.

Now here (it seems to the writer) is just where the need for women's work and scope for their energies come in, and where the country is suffering much for lack of it. While it is true that single women may not homestead at present, there are any amount of homesteads to be bought at very reasonable prices, many of them being much more suitable for the occupation of, say, a couple of single women with a love for animals and an aptitude for country-life, than an original homestead as offered by the Government, such being usually far from railroad communication.

A short description of one such quarter section, particularly known to the writer, may serve as an illustration. It was occupied, about five years ago, by a young man who resided part of the year with some relatives near at hand; but as it was necessary for him to put in what are called residence duties during part of the year, he built a nice little shack of poplar logs cut in the neighbourhood, filled these in with sods, and made a small cellar for storage of vegetables

in the winter. As some companions were also going to spend the winter with him, with a considerable quantity of stock, a large stable was also built of upright poles well sodded round and with a hay roof, and large enough to hold some twenty-four head of cattle and horses. A small bank or hillock was excavated away and formed part of one wall of this building, which, however, though forming an excellent winter shelter, would require much more work to make it a really permanent cow-house. Nor must the shack be confounded with the idea of a pretty little British cottage, though the conventional Irish mud cabin or the Scotch "shieling on the misty island" might convey some idea of it.

When this homestead was taken up, about five years ago, it was twenty-seven miles from the nearest railroad station; now there is a nice little railroad town about fourteen miles distant.

This young homesteader, working in connection with others, had the use of oxen and implements for two or three weeks of the first season in ploughing and preparing twenty acres, in fulfilment of his homestead duties and in anticipation of a crop during the following year. A considerable part of the land lay rather low, among rolling hills, and contained some nice little hay sloughs, and on this account (its depres-

AN OLD-TIME RANCHER AT HOME.

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sion) he feared it might be liable to early frost, and so preferred seeding it to oats rather than wheat. The eastern part, however, was rather higher and sloped to the west, and here he was able to strike out his field in furrows of nearly half a mile long, running north and south. This piece of land was fortunately fairly free from both stone and scrub, so with a good team of four oxen it did not take him more than about two weeks to prepare it, including ploughing and discing.

The following season he had a splendid crop of "Banner" oats, going about eighty bushels to the acre, the straw of which in some places was nearly six feet high.

His parents, however, were living on Vancouver Island, and as he desired to join them, he sold the homestead, after obtaining the patent, to an English gentleman who happened to be visiting the neighbourhood, and who gave him a thousand dollars for it.

Now it does seem to me that, with butter selling at from twenty to thirty cents a pound in a railway town only fourteen miles away, two capable women or a young couple, with six or eight milking cows, on such a place, would have an assured livelihood, or at least one much more assured than if merely dependent on a successful grain crop. More-

over, in such a case there need be no waiting, but an income would accrue practically at once. Of course, some capital would be needed, as cattle cannot be bought in an ordinary way for credit (that doubtful blessing), as machinery can. Land, however, may have the payment spread over a term of years at a fair rate of interest, and five hundred to a thousand dollars should go a long way towards purchasing a small dairy of milking cows.

To obtain a high yield and quality of butter, much would depend on the class of stock, feeding, and so on, and perhaps, at first, it could hardly be expected to reach the average of British production. But surely, with such land as I have described, it only needs, in addition to a little capital, reasonable knowledge and experience and capable practical work to ensure not only a good living, but in a few years a reasonable competence and an economic security far superior to that of many women in situations. And as regards the facilities for marketing, even in Britain people are driving to market with poultry, eggs, and butter for longer distances than would be necessary in the case we are considering, and the prices obtained but little if any better. The condition of the roads varies, but usually a buggy in summer and a cutter in winter, drawn by a

smart Indian pony, would cover the distance each way in an hour and a half or two hours. Assuming that such an undertaking was entered upon by two single women, there are usually plenty of bachelor neighbours who would help with the needful cultivation and harvest and putting up enough hay; and though the conditions would at first be primitive, as economic prosperity came these would rapidly improve, and a joy and pleasure would be found as results were achieved. The unconventional shack would give place to the comfortable frame-house, with simple labour-saving appliances far superior to those found in the ordinary British middle-class home; a telephone would be fitted, rendering communication easy with neighbours, the neighbouring town, and the outside world. It is needless to enlarge on the profit to be obtained from poultry and hogs, but a word may be useful as to that very important matter of water supply. In the particular case of which I am writing there is a good slough within about a mile, deep enough to be unfrozen to the bottom in winter, with smaller ones on the place available during the summer, as a rule. When necessary for the stock to go to the deep slough, the simplest way is to drive them, and for this purpose a cattle pony as a mount is a great help. Later, of

course, a good well could be put down, and would prove a very desirable addition to the property.

There are probably much better openings than the foregoing, which may, however, serve to show that there are opportunities for capable women with some capital, a knowledge which will grow, and a desire both for a country-life and one of single blessedness in a new country.

A young couple embarking on such an enterprise would of course enjoy many advantages, though the cares incidental to maternity and the rearing of a young family during the early years of unavoidable toil and struggle should not be lost sight of by any who think of making a home even in the more settled districts.

CHAPTER XIV

WE PREPARE FOR SEEDING

THOUGH the days began sensibly to lengthen, and we had one or two milder spells of weather, yet on the whole winter seemed to tighten its grip, for the Old-Country saying that "As the days lengthen the cold strengthens" seems emphasized on the great North-Western prairies. Nevertheless, as January drew to a close, in spite of grey skies and icy blasts, our thoughts turned towards spring, and a mild day or two, when the noon temperature rose to but little below the freezing-point, warned us we must seriously think about getting a supply of seed, that there might be no delay when the snow cleared and the land softened enough to permit the seeder to get to work.

The seed question had, of course, often been alluded to in our chats round the stoves in the shacks of various neighbours, and at grain growers' meetings, and it constantly crops up in the columns of agricultural papers; more-

over, provincial Government departments give a good deal of attention to the matter, and on one or more occasions a special seed train has been sent over the railways, with experts to advise the growers and help them.

But in spite of this it is doubtful if the average settler realizes the importance of the matter as one of those links in the long chain that go to make the prospect of a good harvest probable. In fact, following such a season as we had passed through, it seemed doubly important, for the fact seemed to be that the amount of really first-class seed there was throughout the country was strictly limited. Moreover, the disastrous season had left many men in such a poor financial position that they had not the wherewithal to buy any seed at all. Under these circumstances, and seeing that the general prosperity of the country depended on its grain harvest, it became needful for the Government of the province to step in to help. This it did through the municipalities, and arrangements were made by which needy farmers were able to get seed by giving a note for payment after harvest.

Backed by the Provincial Government, the municipality was of course able to borrow from the banks (though, be it noted, on no very favourable terms, being already in debt) and to pur-

chase seed from any fortunate enough to have it. In spite of all this, however, the quality was by no means all that could be wished, and we felt far from satisfied, as did our friends on No. 9.

Such was the state of affairs when, one unusually mild day, we paid our friends a visit to ask their opinion.

Now, here it may be well to say that the principal wheat grown in Saskatchewan is what is known as "Red Fife." It is looked on as the standard variety to such an extent that there is a stipulation that No. 1 grade shall contain a very large percentage of this variety. It is said to yield well and to be of that hard, flinty nature that makes it valuable for milling purposes; on the other hand, it does not mature so rapidly as "Preston," for instance. The latter, however, is a softer wheat, and does not under equal conditions grade so high, and yet in the last season a man who had "Preston" did much better in our neighbourhood than if he had sown "Red Fife," simply because it had matured earlier and thus escaped some of the fall frosts that had proved so destructive. There are also some other varieties which need not concern us here, and, of course, winter wheat is grown in Alberta and to some slight extent in Saskatchewan; but so

far there has been little success with it in our district, though it is possible that with more experiment it may have a future before it.

About this time, however, there was much talk of a new variety that was spoken very highly of, and known as "Marquis," and we found that Bob had been in correspondence with the superintendent of the Experimental Farm at Indian Head about this variety. He read us a very interesting letter he had received from the kind and genial superintendent, from which we learned that he considered "Marquis" fully equal in yield, if not superior, to "Red Fife," and with an equal milling quality, also from a week to ten days earlier. The letter informed us that some seed could be obtained in that neighbourhood.

All this seemed so encouraging that an animated discussion followed as to whether we could obtain some of the coveted seed. After a talk about ways and means, it became evident that it would be a much more costly venture in the first instance than purchasing local seed, but it seemed to us possible that by clubbing our resources in this line we might manage what seemed to be decidedly worth trying, and our friends urged me to make a trip to Indian Head and investigate further and try to buy some.

This trip seemed hardly necessary, but as Bob offered to drive me to F—— and fetch me, I undertook to go, though, as it afterwards proved, we might have bought our seed by sample, and so saved the expenses of the journey, which a new-comer should bear in mind are heavy, and apt to run away with many dollars.

I was further encouraged to go as we also needed seed oats, and it was especially desirable these should be of good, sound quality. It is very important that oats for seed should not have been even slightly frozen, as it is said they will not grow when that has been the case, while wheat, if but slightly touched by frost, may still make fairly good seed. For myself, however, I believe the quality of grain for seed cannot be too high; for, admitting that germination will take place, it is surely important that this should happen quickly and uniformly over a field, and in testing samples I have found that where the grains were not first-rate, though a large percentage eventually grew, they seemed to germinate in a slow and irregular manner, while a really good sample sprang up quickly and regularly. I am not aware of the most scientific method of testing seed, but have usually done it by planting, say, a hundred grains, in rows of ten, in an inch or so of soil in a shallow box very

near the surface and keeping them well watered and warm. Simply counting the numbers that came up of course gave the percentage.

As regards oats, there are several varieties, including what are known as "Thousand Dollar," and some recently introduced from Britain by a well-known firm, but perhaps the "Banner" oats are the best known, and if the seed be good should yield as satisfactory results as any. Then, too, small seeds of weeds have to be very carefully guarded against, and some of these are apt to elude the most careful winnowing with fanning mill and screens.

So it was arranged that Bob should requisition a cutter on loan from a neighbour, and with their two ponies make a trip to F—— with me; so we returned to my homestead, and got things into shape so that Tom could manage till my return, and on the second day thereafter Bob appeared with the cutter and the little team, and we set forth.

It was a brilliant morning, but with a very low temperature. Our road lay due south and the low, yellow disc of the sun was nearly in our faces, on which, however, the keen air made itself felt as we cut through it, especially down the slopes, while the runners of the cutter gave out that hissing sound peculiar to them when travel-

ling in low temperatures. Some one, however, had lent me a good fur coat, with a high collar, and with my fur cap well down over my ears, the drive proved enjoyable, though we were glad after a couple of hours' time to reach Mr. and Mrs. S——'s (the half-way house, as we called it) in time for dinner; and very pleasant it was to get into a warm room once more. Sitting still in a cutter for a long spell is even a colder business, in a very low temperature, than riding in a wagon-box on a bob-sleigh; besides, as the latter is a slower, heavier affair, there is a temptation when one is cold to get out and walk the hills. There is, indeed, a weird, almost grotesque Canadian ballad telling how a young man, after driving his young lady a long distance to a dance, on arrival at the appointed place was horrified to find her frozen to death.

There was, however, no fear of such tragic consequences on this little journey, and after the enjoyment of a good dinner with our kind hosts, a couple of hours' drive over the snow-covered landscape, shining in the setting sun, brought us within sight of the tall grain elevators of F——. Then, passing the little cemetery some distance from the new town, with its few graves of early settlers, and following those marks of civilization—the long lines of telegraph-posts

—we were soon in town, and putting the ponies safely into the big livery barn, withdrew ourselves to the warm hotel. The aspect of these little prairie towns naturally differs a good bit in the winter from their appearance in the summer; for though there is often a good deal of coming and going connected with the hauling of grain during the former season, people do not linger about in the streets much, with the temperature often many degrees below zero; so if you want to find the population you must seek them in the pool-room, or the hotel bar, or the comfortably warmed and often well-lighted stores, or at their homes.

To the new arrival from Europe or the East they would probably seem one of the most forlorn and dismal places on earth, worse perhaps than a comfortable camp in the woods or on the open prairie; but such a one should soon realize that there is a social life, that the folks have their own joys and sorrows, and, knowing each other, there is a community of interest and a common spirit not apparent at first sight, with a fellowship growing up round the churches and school that one may hope in the future will bear good fruit of human kindness.

Though there was an east- and west-bound train both morning and evening, it seemed the

best one for my trip was in the morning, so Bob and I played a friendly game of billiards in the pool-room and made a few purchases we needed. Early next morning the train pulled in nearly on time, and having previously breakfasted, the cry was "All aboard." Considering the distances these trains have to travel and the number of stops they have to make, on the whole they keep wonderful time, and the delays at wayside stations are usually very short, and their train crews handle the baggage in and out with a speed that I often think might be emulated by many of our British branch lines and local trains, and even in the case of long waits at some larger stations by our through trains, which seem in this way to waste the time gained by fast running over our splendid permanent ways. Long waits for trains, of course, often do occur on the Western railroads owing to breakdowns, the special severity of the weather, or similar causes; but the probable time when the train is expected is usually known at the station and principal hotels, which makes such occurrences much more endurable. For instance, you may hear that a train has been delayed by a snowdrift five hundred miles away and is therefore two hours late, and a later inquiry may elicit the fact that further delay has taken place, and the two hours

are now increased to four; but the Canadian knows something of the difficulty of working traffic in his climate, with the immense distances the trains have to traverse and the varying conditions they are apt to meet in their trans-continental journeys, and so, where an Englishman might be inclined to grumble, he takes such matters very philosophically.

Perhaps the extremes of Western life come to the fore more in travelling than in any other way. In a luxurious parlour car or sleeper, made up as a day car with thick velvet cushions and thick carpets, or in the diner with its three-fold-thick glass windows, one may enjoy a luxury of travel superior to that on our British railways or, indeed, to the ordinary run of hotels; for the large open cars are kept at a temperature that renders overcoats and rugs and headgear needless, and are in many cases vestibuled, so that one may pass from one to the other of the glass-enclosed end platforms without being exposed to the bitter outer air. Yet here you may possibly meet men who have recently come hundreds of miles over snow and ice with a dog team, or from some lonely shack whence they have spent many months, having travelled to the railroad with their team of oxen. Such are the contrasts in the mere material environment of the

individual, and many are the bits of personal experience to which one may listen, or the vivid narratives of prospectors or hunters, with an occasional plunge into the depths of religion or philosophy, as the great train pursues its long journey over the wintry waste of snow-covered landscape. The journey is, of course, varied by stops at the little stations some eight or ten miles apart, and broken in a welcome way by meals, announced usually as "first call to dinner" or "last call to supper."

But, to return to business, as I wanted to get further information about seed, I got into conversation with a tall and stoutish man sitting by me, whom I judged to be a farmer, and after mentioning our difficulties as to seed, asked if he could say anything about the much-talked-of "Marquis" wheat.

"Yes," said he; "I know a man near me who had fifty acres, and he had sixty bushels to the acre; it ripened pretty good, too, though it was a bit frozen."

"Then you think it is a success?" said I.

"On the whole I do," he returned, but went on: "Mind you, I reckon all seed—I mean varieties—need selection to prevent deteriorating. You may sow a something special one year and get a good crop, and think your fortune is about

made, and you have only to keep on sowing seed grown from the same; but it seems to want constant selection of the best kernels and also change of ground to keep it up to the mark. Then there's weeds. We have been bothered with them a lot in our part, and as your country gets more broken up and cultivated, you're pretty certain to get 'em. One dirty field will infect a whole district. It's all very well to pass laws about the cleaning of separators, and to have good weed inspectors, and summer fallowing to get rid of 'em, but in my opinion clean seed is half the battle; prevention is better than cure."

Arrived at the Experimental Farm, I was very kindly received by the worthy superintendent, who showed me round, though, of course, in the winter there was not as much to be seen as would have been the case in the summer. He pointed out the effect of rust on some samples of straw I had brought, and gave me the names of some men who had "Marquis" wheat and "Banner" oats seed for sale. The weather had again turned bitterly cold, and I was glad to return to the hotel; but the telephone enabled me to get into communication with one or two, and as the distances were considerable, I hired a cutter and team, and set out to interview my men, at first driving through the wintry streets, flanked by

the comfortable residences, of Indian Head, evidently occupied mostly by folk in far better circumstances than the residents in our part. But I reflected that, of course, it was a much older community, and anyway Canada was a land of hope.

During the day I was shown various samples, but so poor had been the previous season, that even here a perfect sample seemed unobtainable, and owing to this fact, and that it was in the early days of the introduction of the "Marquis" wheat, the prices asked were very high. This gave me much heart-searching as to what Tom and our friends would say as to the outlay of our slender capital if I purchased on these terms. To some extent the same was true of the "Banner" oats offered. However, I had come to try to do business, and ultimately I arranged to purchase one hundred and fifty bushels of slightly frozen guaranteed "Marquis" at two dollars per bushel, including bags, to be cleaned and put on rail forthwith, being ninety bushels for Tom and myself, and the rest for our friends, who did not wish to try so much and wanted more oats. Of the latter I bought two hundred bushels, of which Tom and I were to have sixty. The terms were to be half cash, and the balance in notes bearing 8 per cent.

interest, due before the end of December following. I was assured that 90 per cent. would germinate on test, and took samples to try; this ultimately proved to be the case, but in the case of the wheat the time taken was irregular.

Having done the best I could, but with many misgivings as to the final upshot of the transaction, I was anxious to get home, and started on the morning train to catch the C.N.R. Westbound at Regina. At that place I had just time for a run round the town, and arrived at F—— in the evening.

Without forestalling the result of the harvest, I may say at once that we had no reason to complain of the way we were treated by the seed growers at Indian Head.

Although Bob had undertaken to meet me, he was not in F—— on my arrival, and, as I knew something unforeseen might easily have delayed him, I determined to get a lift with the first suitable team going north.

There was, however, an important matter to attend to, and I was not sorry for the opportunity to try to purchase a seeder, as the big grain-drill is called, though Tom and I had discussed the matter anxiously, asking ourselves whether we could not do without it for this season. The fact is, plenty of farmers are very willing to lend

their implements to a new-comer when not in use, but it naturally happens that in busy seasons the would-be borrower has to wait, and yet such is the urgency at these times, that a few days' delay may mean a golden opportunity missed.

I therefore started out to interview the various implement agents. These seeders sow about twenty rows at once, some sowing the seed behind a shoe or short cultivator and others after a small disc. Now, we had agreed that we really could not afford to pay cash, but if we could get one on payment of one-third and the balance after harvest, it would be well to have one, and so make ourselves independent of borrowing. After a good deal of talk and inspection of different implements, it appeared that an agent had a seeder of United States make of which I had heard a good account, which had already done some work, so was not quite new, which he agreed to let us have on the terms named for seventy dollars, and also a set of harrows on the same terms for twenty dollars; and the bargain was struck, we agreeing jointly to sign the lien notes. It need hardly be pointed out that such transactions are undoubtedly often helpful to the beginner, though as such notes carry interest at 8 per cent., and as there is a lien on the article sold, should the crops prove a failure, especially in

succession, those who sign them are often landed hopelessly in debt.

Constant reference to such details may seem trivial, but is essential to enable the would-be pioneer farmer or his friends from the Old Country to estimate the prospects of success or failure likely to attend his efforts and sacrifices in going to a new country. It wants to be well understood that while large areas of the prairie are rapidly converted into good farms, it constantly happens that the men who have borne the burden of the pioneer work are not the ones to benefit when prosperity comes, and that the instruments by which they are dispossessed, as it were, are to a large extent these lien notes, and mortgages of one sort and another.

Having finished the business of the seeder and harrows, I decided to stop the night in town, arranging for getting our new implements out by a returning grain freighter, and take the trail home next day. Having been fortunate enough to find one of our neighbours in town with a team, and returning with an empty sleigh, we loaded up the implements thereon, and taking the trail early in the day, had no difficulty in doing the twenty-six miles in fair time and getting back before dark to No. 9, where I put up for the night.

CHAPTER XV

LETTERS HOME

ALTHOUGH we were now all eagerly looking forward to spring, winter had by no means done with us yet. True, we had pretty well passed the days and nights of fifty or sixty degrees below zero, but there were days in late February and March of the blizzard character which made anything but the most needful outdoor work practically impossible. We had snowstorms accompanied by strong winds, which not only drive the snow before them, but prevent it from settling except in sheltered places, where it forms huge drifts. One result of this state of things is that the air is filled with the driving, whirling snow, which obliterates the familiar landmarks beyond a few feet and renders it positively dangerous to move about in the open. This is the sort of thing that is known as a blizzard, and the conditions which make it so much dreaded beyond either the cold or the bitter wind, added to the confusion of the elements, seem to impart

something of the same quality to the mind and to benumb the senses. On one such day near the end of February we let our little bunch of stock go without their usual trip to the watering hole.

At such times we were, of course, practically confined to our shack, and though there was a certain amount of cooking, washing, and clothes-mending to be done, and we had newspapers, magazines, and books, we realized that it is well for the early settler on his homestead in the winter to seek some regular employment. A story is current of some young fellows who, under such circumstances, forgathered during the winter in each other's shacks and spent their time in playing cards, and when the supply of firewood ran out, proceeded to burn one shack after another to keep themselves warm. Whether true or not, it indicates one of the temptations into which settlers from the older countries lacking resource and initiative may fall. There is, however, no need for this sort of thing.

In many parts of the great Dominion where game is plentiful there are experienced trappers who live alone all the winter, making the rounds of their traps periodically and gathering dollars in the shape of pelts. But as settlement advances and the country passes through the transi-

tion stages, there is not the same opportunity for this, nor can the inexperienced new-comer be expected to undertake such work, and it would be undesirable for him to try.

In this connection, stock is a source of constant interest and occupation, and the problems connected with its profitable keeping under the changing conditions of settlement are many. I have made reference to this matter and my own ambitions with regard to it, and as our neighbours, and especially our friends on No. 9, were making efforts in the same direction, we were naturally interested in their successes and failures. Our one cow had continued to supply us with a certain amount of milk, but this had become so limited that we had given up making butter, and were gradually drying her off. On No. 9, Harry had wisely employed some of his enforced winter leisure in making a kitchen cabinet in the form of a dresser, with shelves for cups and plates, and with bins pivoted and made to pull out at the top for oatmeal and flour. Bob, however, who was much interested in stock and horses, found much occupation in looking after these animals. There were two problems which called for a considerable amount of consideration in connection with the matter, and during the fall he had made one journey with a view to the

solution of one of these problems. He told of these in letters home, and as he knew I was keenly interested, he allowed me to read them and make extracts bearing on the matters, which I will give here. First, however, I will briefly state the problems. The first is the question of marketing matured stock. A man, after carefully tending his little bunch of stock for three or four years, finds perhaps that about November he has three or four animals in the pink of condition, and naturally wants the best price he can get. Winnipeg, with its great stockyards, is of course the great market for the North-West; but it is many hundred miles distant, and the owner, being a settler and not a rancher, cannot make up a car-load even by clubbing with his neighbours, for as yet there is not enough stock in the district; and even if he could, the poor beasts which he has tended with so much care would probably arrive at the stockyards sadly out of condition after their long, trying journey, which fact, combined with railway freight, agents' charges, and other expenses, would very much reduce the amount of dollars ultimately received for the animals. Of course, it is the old problem for the farmer in all countries of the middleman. The position of the rancher is a little different, even if he can only ship twenty to fifty

THE RANCHER'S BUNCH OF STOCK.

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head of stock. His method of breeding and raising stock is less expensive, but it is needless to go into details.

Here is an extract from a letter of Bob's, showing how he endeavoured to sell some of his stock to the best advantage:

"I am home again after a long journey to Saskatoon and back. R—— B—— and I started out last Saturday week and got home yesterday night, being away a fortnight altogether.

"I am sorry to say that as far as the marketing of the nine head of cattle went, it was to some extent a faree, as we did not realize anything like the priee we had hoped, owing to there being a glut on the local market. However, I suppose we should not kick, as our cattle realized more than any one else's who sold there.

"Well, suffice it to say the nine head brought four hundred and eighty dollars instead of five hundred and fifty to six hundred, as I had hoped. I discovered to my chagrin that it was a poor place to sell, and then that calves were much cheaper than here, it being a dairy district, and outside of veal (which happened to be down in price) there was no sale. Finding I could get a car-load up to R—— for twenty-two dollars, I bought all the calves I could, and we came back in a car with the ponies and the dog, besides

another team which we brought up for a man as far as R—— for three dollars, thus reducing our railroad fare to nineteen dollars. The calves varied in price from twelve to seventeen dollars, all of which were pretty good stock, and some well bred. We got a thoroughbred Shorthorn bull-calf for twenty-two dollars, which I intend to raise for a bull. I feel satisfied with the trip on the whole.

"It took us four days to drive the cattle to Saskatoon. The first night was the worst, as we spent the latter part of it in an old deserted stable that was still wet from the recent rains, and we ourselves were wet through with snow. It was very uncomfortable, but neither of us was any the worse. The next morning we had to ford a narrow stream, and the cattle would not do this until we had been working at them for two hours. For the first two days we did not see the sun, but only got off our right direction once, and made B—— at night, where we stopped with some friends. The next day we crossed the ferry at the Elbow, and one of the cattle jumped off into the river and swam back; however, having caught her again and got half way across, she decided to swim the rest, and this time got safely over. We dined in the Doukhobor village of Ceepee, and thence journeyed

on south-easterly to Saskatoon, where we were one day ahead of time. We pastured our cattle on some of the city lots far out, that were worth untold fortunes during the boom and are not worth anything now, and the night before the sale some of our cattle got restless and broke away, and kept us busy all through the frosty night riding and finding them. In the early morning, when found, they looked in only half the condition they had done, as we had carefully nursed them all along the road and had them rolling fat; this was just like cattle, to get mad the last night and run around trying to get thin again. Our dog, Chummie, although only a pup, was invaluable; in town he was sometimes a source of embarrassment, as he refused to be left in a barn at night or to allow me to go anywhere without him. He even had to accompany me to a picture-show and lie under the seat.

"I got a cattle-dealer to help me to buy the calves at a dollar a head, and we drove round picking them up, which took us four days, and the next day loaded them. It took R—— and self three days to drive them from R——. We could not travel far, as the little ones would play out after ten miles or so, but we had no casualties either going or coming. We passed through many miles of country where every

farmer had a telephone, and discovered that it is used for many things that do not at first occur to one—hunting strayed cattle, fighting prairie fires, besides the constant touch with the market and the knowledge of condition of roads, calling of grain growers' meetings, tracing of criminals or bums, besides ascertaining before starting for town with produce the demand and the price, which cuts out swindling by elevators, etc."

So much for Bob's experiment in driving his stock to market, and it may be added in passing that the calves did not altogether fulfil expectations, for although he tried to take good care of them during the winter, several of them died. This he attributed partly to their being dairy-raised calves instead of running with their mothers in the ranch style.

As regards the second problem, it should be realized that the settler who wishes to raise stock is often confronted by a stage in the development of the country between the ranching and dairying stages. The early settler, with his hundred and sixty acres, most of which he proposes to break up, usually sees around him large stretches of prairie covered with abundant feed, some perhaps held by men who have no intention of settling, and only hold to sell, and in

some districts large quantities are held by railroad companies or other corporations. Seeing all this spare pasturage, it naturally occurs to him that if he could manage to get a few head of stock to run they would prove a good source of profit. The newspapers and agricultural journals and politicians urge the same, and, impelled by that healthy instinct for bettering his position which has in many cases driven him across the ocean, he succeeds in getting a cow or two, and these soon increase, and ere long he and his neighbours like-minded with himself often find they have a nice little bunch of stock.

But this success, gratifying as it is, brings himself and neighbours face to face with another problem. In the district we are speaking of, herd law is probably in force, which means that, while the settlers have broken up a considerable portion of their homesteads, they are not obliged to fence; the stock, running loose, have a natural partiality for growing and succulent crops, and are very apt to seek them in preference to the somewhat dry if nutritious "prairie-wool" and slough grass. Moreover, this (especially if it happens to be a dry season) is not so abundant as it was before the influx and increase of the running stock. A change to fence law would of course provide a remedy, but this is a costly

operation for the individual, and takes time; moreover, many still are without stock, and so there may be some difference of opinion as to changing the system.

Such was the condition of things that made Bob undertake a winter journey to try to find a suitable location on which to establish a small ranch to accommodate his growing bunch of stock and horses. The search was not altogether a success, but the following extract from his letter may prove of interest:

"Here goes for some account of our doings up north. We, H—— B—— and I, were looking for a place that would be suitably big to let a bunch of cattle summer feed, and also where there would be lots of hay. These conditions were easy to find, but for my purposes the place must also be within easy distance of railroad, and it must be possible, by a mile or so of fencing, to ensure that the cattle cannot stray in summer. Now, then, I will try to describe some of our trip. The first day we made C——'s, and slept there; the next we made a mistake in our trail, owing to the weather being thick, and so lost several hours. This meant we had to camp in the bush.

"In seeking a camp there are three things that we look for—shelter, dry wood, and water for the horses. The first night was windy and

rough, but in the bush we were all right; although we were not fortunate enough to make a spruce bluff, we still had enough of the three essentials to be pretty comfortable. The first night's camp was my first experience of camping in zero weather, and so naturally I was very particular about fixing the tent. Afterwards, when more used to it, we dispensed with the tent on many occasions, and found that a sleeping-bag for each one of us made out of two blankets apiece, into which we got and then squirmed our way into the big canvas bag, together furnished ample warmth, and even at forty-three below zero we were not the least bit scared of being frozen.

"Now, while on the subject of camping, I will try to tell you how to do it comfortably and safely, then all I have to do in this account is to say we saw so-and-so and then camped, and you can imagine the rest. Travelling through the bush, we observe that the sun is setting and that we must be on the look-out for a place to camp. As a matter of fact, you are watching and observing more or less all the afternoon, to make sure that at or near sunset you are likely to strike a place that will suit. You are looking for a bunch of spruce near a slough or lake or stream where there is plenty of dry wood. It is wise always to carry a supply of birch bark

or other good kindling material and a few split dry sticks. It is important to find a big enough bunch of spruce or other shade-trees, so that the horses will have no draught. Now, the first thing to do is to clear with the axes a space for your temporary stable, pile the brush and trees so cut away alongside your forest stall, and at the horses' heads, at the outside of the trees forming the stall, cut down one or more spruce-trees and strip the same of branches, which you pile along the brush at either side of the horses and at their heads, so as to form a shade that will break any wandering breeze. Now, at some distance behind the horses, clear the ground of snow and build a fire. Be very careful that you have enough small, dry wood to keep your fire going well until you can pile on logs. As soon as you have a good hot fire, get all the dry willow, or other good dry wood, you can, and gradually lengthen out your fire until it is burning about the length of your bedplace, because that fire is burning down through the twigs, etc., until it thaws out several inches of ground, so making a nice place for your bed afterwards. Now hurry on supper: melt snow in a pan for making tea, put frozen strips of pork in the frying-pan first, and on top the frozen biscuits, previously cooked, and on top of that again

a lid to keep steam in and fire out. In a very short time supper is ready, and after eating our meal, the fire having died down, we scrape the embers over towards the horses, but not too close, where we start a fresh fire, not entirely of dry wood this time, so that it will keep in longer. We put spruce boughs down for our own bed, and no spring mattress is superior. We unharness the horses, feed them with oats, and put two blankets apiece on them, finally giving them a feed of hay, if we have it. Pile the logs on the fire, take your socks and moccasins off and dry them, put them on again, same with mitts and fur cap, crawl into the bags, and then into the double bag, pull the flap over and go to sleep. I noticed that I got more real rest out of four or five hours' sleep like this than if I had, say, seven in a house. The horses were all right, and kept all right until within two days of home, when they caught cold owing to stopping in a warm stable and not being used to it. Now I have given you a good idea of camping in the bush, so will go on with my narrative.

"At dinner-time on the third day we made a Norwegian's place about twelve miles this side Wichigan Lake, striking the lake just as it got dark. We got on the ice and cut a hole to make sure it was strong enough, finding it about ten

inches thick. Heading out for the north-west, steering by a star, as I could not see Les Fleurs Point (as it happened, we missed it by a quarter of a mile), we travelled about five miles on the ice, then decided to pull ashore and camp, so we had our supper at midnight. Next day we travelled north and east again, stayed the night with a homesteader who was on the outside edge of the present settlement in that district, but six miles north-east of Wichigan Lake. On the following morning we made nine miles and crossed Big River on the ice (not a big river then), and having surmounted a very steep hill about two miles beyond, we rested the horses. We looked back across a steep ravine and were surprised to see two or three large holes on the opposite hillside, so I got the glasses and saw some large tracks leading into one of the holes. Scrambling across the valley we discovered—what do you think? A bear's den! We decided to try to get Mr. Bruin out on our return, as he had just holed up for the winter. This was nine miles from the nearest house to the south-west, and twenty miles south-west of the next house on our road, which was an Indian shack at the outskirts of the White Fish Indian Reserve, which we made at noon next day. The latter is a most beautiful spot above a lake lying low from th

surrounding level, and lined with lovely evergreens. It must be a very heaven among the islands in summer, if there is any season when the mosquito is not busy. After this there was a very sparse settlement, just an odd settler here and there for thirty-five miles to Big River.

"Of the whole distance of, say, a hundred miles roughly, the first twenty is prairie; the next twenty is solid bush; the next twenty is suitable for ranching, being bushy grazing land; the next twenty is burnt bush, with a big grassy oasis approaching the Indian Reserve on either side of several miles, though none of it as open as the prairie that we are used to. In many of the lower places there is high grass. The next twenty miles is again solid bush, relieved frequently by lakes among the hills, just as big and lovely in their way as Grasmere, for instance, and many of them not shown on our map. Round most of these lakes, but not all, there is a considerable piece of grass, or, as we should say, slough; then in some parts only the grass-land opens out into bushy country, and then the woods. In other lakes the woods come right to the water's edge and even lie over.

"The town of Big River is about as big a town as R——, and is distinctly a one man town, being overshadowed by certain business interests.

It is, however, the fur-traders' starting place for the wilderness, the real jumping-off place, and there is in winter a big trade of fishing carried on in the various lakes from Isle le Croix, Churchill River, Dore Lake, Lake la Plonge, and Stony Lake, called Lake la Ronde. Also the other route by Green Lake, there are at least some fifty teams freighting fish all winter, and every pound of it goes through Big River. There is a train each way to and from Prince Albert three times a week, and there is a mail delivery twice a week, as here, both at Big River and also away up as far as Green Lake at the north end. The land is not surveyed for homesteading for more than six miles or so north of the town. It is a land so broken up by lakes, rivers, muskegs, etc., also in part so covered with heavy timber, that it is not suited to homesteading; for instance, men do not raise grain to any extent where they travel by dog train in the winter and by canoe in the summer. Now, amongst this land, rough as it is, there are considerable stretches of country that would be suitable for ranchers, having the essential points we were looking for—practically an island with a considerable amount of low, bushy country for summer grazing and miles of hay along the shores of streams. Here the living is very cheap,

and the staple articles of food are fish and moose, and one and a half dollars will buy a quarter of a moose from an Indian. I have been assured that there are such places within twenty miles of Big River. We did quite a little exploring up Lake la Ronde, but were not satisfied, as it was impossible for us to tell what was muskeg and what was hay land, so we decided to come home and take a trip up to Stony Lake at the end of May or the beginning of June, as soon after seeding as possible, in order to examine the country in the summer. We arranged with an old-timer to be ready for us with a canoe, so that we can thoroughly see the country. Fancy a place where summer travel is largely confined to Indian canoes because of the host of lakes and rivers.

"I was going to tell you briefly of our unsuccessful bear-hunt. We discussed the matter with more than one old hunter, and they told us that we should be able to get him out of the hole by smoking with sulphur, as, though a bear is supposed to go fast asleep for the winter, he is, as a matter of fact, only rather drowsy most of the time, and we should probably be able to make him angry enough with the smoke to get him out. We camped on our return by a stream about a mile from the hole, having two packages of

sulphur suitably wrapped up in paper and soaked in coal oil, weighing a pound each. We also twisted a soft wire together, making a big, strong running noose, which we attached to a heavy log and hung in the mouth of the hole. Well, we smoked that bear for two hours and he never showed up. It was very disappointing, and H—— was starting into the hole with a big knife, but I objected, as it was much too dangerous. We knew he was there because of his fresh tracks, which were right in the hole, and he had not been away from the mouth of his hole. We would have dug him out if we had had the tools, but it was too big a job altogether, as he was about fourteen feet in the hillside, and the hill was at such an angle that we would have had to dig down seven feet or so. Very loath to leave, we finally gave him up, but we told the nearest neighbours, living some nine miles away."

CHAPTER XVI

A PRAIRIE FIRE

One fine morning in April, with a gentle south wind blowing and the sun shining brightly, we came to the conclusion that the time had come to prepare in earnest for the work of seeding. With this end in view we were busy getting ready a few stores, implements, and our simple cooking utensils for the trip to Tom's homestead, where we proposed to put in wheat.

"There is a lot of smoke over there to the south-east," remarked Tom as he came into the shack, where I was packing the kettle and frying-pan, with some cups and plates, into a small packing-case.

"Some of those fellows down there burning off stubble, I suppose," was my answer.

He helped me to finish packing the case, and we both carried it out to place in the wagon, and as we stepped out of the shack I was certainly startled by the vision that met our eyes. In the clear air, smoke flying before the wind or

rising in a column in calm weather is no uncommon sight, as homesteaders are allowed to use fire for burning off stubble and brush (albeit with precautions).

Such smoke is often visible at very long distances, and usually creates little alarm, though often watched with some interest, not unmixed with a feeling of apprehension.

I should more correctly have described the wind as south-easterly, and as the fire was in that quarter also, though rather more easterly, dense masses of smoke were rolling across the southern sky beyond the low hills which lay immediately to the south of us. They were of a light greyish colour, and, as the wind was not strong, rose fairly high, obscuring the former brightness of the sun.

"Looks pretty big," I remarked, adding: "Guess we had better stop a bit and see if it means anything."

After watching it for a few minutes, Tom asked, "Do you think it will come this way?"

"Not unless the wind goes more southerly, as it may with the sun," I replied.

"We are fireguarded, anyway," said Tom.

"I doubt if that will help us much, if the wind increases, with this long grass and that bit of bluff to windward," I answered. There was another thick burst of smoke as the fire probably

reached a dry bluff, which made me say: "It looks bad for some of those fellows further west, so we had better be off and see what we can do."

"What about the stock?" asked Tom.

"We will leave them loose," I answered, adding: "Our bulls won't be much use ploughing in front of the fire, and they will all be safer loose if the fire comes this way."

So, armed with a bag each, we set forth, hurrying across our breaking to a point just behind the smoke. After walking about a mile, we came to the edge of the burnt prairie, where the grass was still burning slowly towards the north-west, We walked briskly along this line, beating the smouldering material out with our bags as we walked. It was, however, before the wind in a north-westerly direction that the main fire was travelling.

We soon came up to half a dozen men and boys and one woman busily fighting a line of fire which was travelling in a westerly direction, and were able to take in the situation at this point.

Immediately in front was a small slough or lake, fringed with dry willow and some poplar, on the north side of which, on rising ground, was a settler's homestead with a shack and stable. The main fire had gone away to the westward round the south side of the slough, and the efforts of

the folk we came upon were directed to saving this shack and stable.

The willows and brush on the south side were still burning, but so far the wood on the north and east of the water, which was about one hundred yards across, had not caught. If this happened, the poor little farmsteading was almost sure to go too.

Fortunately, the ground immediately to the east of the slough and buildings had been grazed over by the couple of cows and heifers of the homestead, so the grass was only long in places, and there still remained a couple of hundred yards between the creeping points of fire and the dry scrub.

I say "creeping," because it is in this insidious way that a prairie fire advances when there is not much wind and the grass is short. But let it reach a patch of long dry grass or get into a bluff, and the case is very different. It almost seems to create a wind, which on the prairie is never long absent, and away it goes, travelling at a great speed. This is what had happened on the south side of the little lake, and advanced points of fire were now perhaps two miles away, having burnt over a section of unoccupied C.P.R. land which had been covered with the thick dry grass grown during the last wet summer.

To return to our fight, some quarter of a mile in our rear was a road which the fire had crossed. When properly kept, such a road forms to some extent a barrier, but in this case there had been some places where, along the sides, there were high grass and scrub, and the devouring element had easily leaped across, especially as at the time there were only two or three at work fighting it there. Now, with some eight of us all working hard, there was more encouragement. The homesteader's children had brought up two buckets of water from the slough, into which we dipped our grain-bags, with which we beat out the fire, though one vigorous fighter who had none was using his jacket. Up and down the quarter of a mile line we laboured, the burnt ground scorching our feet through our boots, and with blackened hands and faces. In places where the grass was longer the fire would suddenly leap ahead, and two or three would join together in an onslaught on it. In others, where it appeared to have been stopped, it would break out fiercely again, while all the time in front, but nearer the lake and scrub which we were trying to save from lighting, went the homesteader with his two oxen and plough, trying to make such a fireguard across the path of the advancing flame as would at least check it, if

not entirely stop it, and thus enable us to gain the upper hand. It is an excellent method of stopping a grass fire under some circumstances, and especially with horses in the plough; but the oxen are slow, and on this occasion the frost was not enough out of the ground, and there were stones, so the plough kept jumping out.

After some strenuous toil, those of us who were working on the northern end and centre of the line had succeeded in extinguishing the fire there, and one by one joined those who were fighting round the south and south-east corner of the little lake and the scrub which surrounded it.

Here the grass was much longer, and as the smoke clouds had now passed away to the north-west, the sun shone bright and hot, drying up any last vestiges of the morning dew and parching the bleached prairie and the dry leaves of the willow scrub, which fortunately the fire had not yet reached. The wind, too, had drawn more southerly and was rising, as it often does as the day advances. The ground was so uneven that the plough was useless, and the homesteader, who had left his bulls standing hitched to the plough, took off his waistcoat and even his shirt, and used those garments in an endeavour to beat out the advancing flames. We had, however, little time to note these details, as we

were all making an almost despairing effort to keep the fire from reaching the bluff; for if this happened, we knew the man's shack and stable were doomed. So hard were we at it that we did not note the approach of a wagon and team of horses until a cheery shout greeted us in the rear, and Harry and Sunny Jim joined us, each with a wet sack, and looking round, we saw Bob with several more wet sacks for our use, which he had dipped in a half barrel of water they had brought in the wagon. He too joined in the fight, and thus reinforced, we stopped the further advance of the flames; but we were only just in time.

Now, however, by a determined and concentrated onslaught, we succeeded in cutting off the flames from travelling northward along the narrow strip that still remained between the part already burnt and the edge of the little lake, and the settler's little shack and outbuilding were saved.

Most of us flung ourselves down on an unburnt part of the prairie to rest after our arduous exertions, but hardly had we recovered our breath, than the observant Harry remarked:

"The wind is going round with the sun, boys, and the fire is starting north round the other end of the lake. Jump into the wagon, some of you,

and let us be off and try to save some of those men up yonder."

Hastily passing a few buckets full of water from the lake to the partly emptied cask, four of us, including Tom and myself, climbed into the wagon, and, passing the saved homestead, were soon racing across the rising ground in a north-westerly direction.

Harry had rightly diagnosed the situation, for the flames were now roaring through the scrub at the west end of the water, and a little lumber shack, fortunately unoccupied, as its owner was away working in the woods, was blazing.

Before the advancing fire lay a stretch of long grass on an unoccupied railroad section, and beyond this again, in front of a little bluff which sheltered it from the north and partly surrounded it, was a settler's log shack and stable. Here lived Jack ——, as we knew him, with his wife and three children, the eldest a girl of twelve, with two brothers of seven and five respectively. As we held on as best we could in the rattling wagon behind the good team, which Sunny Jim was driving at a gallop, we thought of their perilous situation with apprehension. We had crossed the outer line of the advancing fire, which was now sweeping up behind us, and as we approached

the little group of buildings, we saw Jack hitching up his team of oxen, while his wife and children were loading the wagon.

It was necessary for us to bear a good deal to the northward in order to reach the imperilled family, and as the fire was now sweeping northward, it gained on us rapidly, and by the time we got to them, fragments of burning grass were flying past us. Driven before the strong breeze which was now blowing, they had crossed the fireguard and ignited the strip of prairie within a few yards of the bluff, while behind us, to the eastward, our retreat in that direction was already cut off. The homestead buildings were obviously doomed, and, indeed, the position of the whole party was perilous.

The quiet but ready Harry took in the situation. "Jump into our wagon with the kids," he shouted to Mrs. Jack; while Bob and another of our party leaped out and helped Jack to urge his oxen forward with the wagon and the few household treasures it contained. The smoke was now nearly blinding us, while the heat was almost unbearable.

Mrs. Jack and the youngsters were in the wagon and Jim had started the team again, when Harry stopped him and shouted, "You'll never make it, boys, and we can't leave you. Shut the stable

door, so the bulls can't go in; unhitch them from the wagon, and leave it."

At such times, if the doors of stables and outbuildings are left open, animals are apt to seek a fancied shelter there, to their destruction. We were now a pretty heavy load, but the team soon got up a gallop, and as we raced away before the oncoming fire, it was a relief to see the bulls, after a short hesitation, following in our trail.

Fortunately, the course was still open to the north-west, where the flames were not travelling quite so fast, as the dry grass was more scanty and the land free from scrub or bluffs. About a mile in that direction lived another homesteader, who was, as the saying is, "well fixed," and it seemed possible that a good stand against the devouring element might be made at his place.

Arrived there, it was soon found that he had a good piece of breaking waiting for seeding to the south of his buildings, while a north and south road ran along the west side, and there was a little slough near at hand. He had a good fireguard to the eastward, and was busy with his team of horses ploughing a second some twenty yards further east. Now, it will be seen that if the fire could be kept from crossing the breaking, the guards, and the road, this man's place was fairly safe. One of the most effective

ways of stopping a prairie fire is to "back-fire," as it is termed; and a few pieces of rag tied to sticks and soaked in kerosene were soon in operation, and though the burnt prairie extended slowly against the wind, we all felt encouraged by the success attending our exertions, and one elderly man of our party became so excited that he started to fire the other side of the road, from which he was warned with shouts of laughter, as this was starting another fire. To the eastward the fire had travelled away to the north, but as the prairie had been back-fired outside the other guard, and also carefully burnt off between, we congratulated ourselves that this farmsteading was safe.

To the westward of the road the grass was not so long, having been grazed off more the previous summer, and as the wind was dying down and the evening dew fell, the danger would lessen, and we stopped for a rest.

The burnt-out family were safely housed here for the time being, and it may be remarked in passing that later on a few neighbours gathered to rebuild their house and stable, while a collection was made at a picnic in the district which went a long way to replace their burnt goods and chattels.

Spring and fall in partly settled country are

most dangerous times for these fires. Co-operation to meet them is the rule, and men go miles away from home to help others, sometimes taking a big risk on their own property if others are in great peril. For such co-operation they never ask pay or return work, as it is an unwritten law that everybody fights fire. Horses are wonderful, lines (as the reins are called) being often burnt in men's hands. Telephones are one of the best means of stopping fires, by spreading news rapidly.

CHAPTER XVII

SEEDING, AND THE SECOND SEASON'S BREAKING AND HAYING

THE time had now fairly come round for us to prepare for the important operation of seeding our wheat. With this object in view we set to work to get the seed, harrows, drill, and camping gear to Tom's homestead, as it would mean our stay there for a few days. The bulls travelled but slowly, and it took us the best part of two days to assemble our implements and material, by which time the frost had left the surface enough to allow of harrowing in preparation for the drilling.

We were impressed with the importance of losing no time in getting in the seed, to give it the best chance of moisture, and of maturing before the early frosts. Bearing this in mind, and as it would require four oxen or horses to haul the long seeder, which could then soon cover the ground, we decided to ask our friends on No. 9 to bring over their team for a day or so, as by the time we had the harrowing done they

would probably have finished seeding their wheat. This plan worked out all right, our friends readily agreeing to accept labour from us later in haying or stoning in payment.

The readiness of the early settlers to co-operate in this way is a very helpful factor, and it is to be hoped this readiness will not grow less as they grow more prosperous. Would that it were more common amongst British farmers! It was now necessary to begin preparing the seed by treating it with formalin or formaldehyde, which has taken the place of the old "bluestone," as it was called.

The object of this is to destroy "smut" spores and other injurious parasites. As yet we had no granary at hand in which to do this work, so we made shift with our wagon-box, sprinkling some thirty-five bushels, or enough for a day's seeding, with a mixture of the required strength, then covering it with empty sacks to keep in the gas or fumes, so that the grain was ready for the next morning's sowing. Tom managed, having got a good start with the harrows, to keep ahead of the drill, and though in a few places the ground had not thawed deeply enough yet to allow the drill to work as freely as it should, on the whole we had made a pretty good job in a couple of days.

Returning to my homestead, we put our oats

in, much as I have described the seeding of the wheat, except that we borrowed a pair of bulls for a day to help our own to haul the heavy seeder. Winter had not done with us yet, for we had quite a fall of snow; but this was welcomed, as it kept the land moist and helped the newly planted seed to germinate as the snow melted, which it soon did. Still the weather continued cold and dreary for some time, and occasionally we wondered if we had done wisely in committing our precious seed to Mother Earth so soon, as the constant changes of temperature, often with a sharp frost, must, we thought, be trying. We had, however, followed the example of our neighbours, but were realizing more than ever that from the time the seed is in the ground until a cheque is handed to us, the actual return is constantly in jeopardy from the vicissitudes of weather and other causes. Our stock had recently been increased by the arrival of a nice foal, with which Nancy had presented us, and also by a little heifer calf, and this addition of young life was a source of great interest. Before setting to work at our own stoning and breaking new land, we put in a few days' spring ploughing and seeding a piece for a neighbour, for which work we were to receive a share of the crop, if there was one.

So the days rapidly passed, and then the real warm weather seemed to come with a burst, and we were rejoiced to note our seeded ground, which had shown so dark against the bleached prairie, rapidly turn to a bright green in the course of a very few days.

Stoning on Tom's homestead proceeded this season as last, except that we did a much smaller strip and did it more thoroughly, breaking afterwards with the bulls ourselves, as we could not afford to pay for the engine again. As the crops progressed, a somewhat unpleasant job had to be undertaken, namely, waging war with the pretty, frisking, but destructive gopher. This is done by the judicious distribution of tempting but poisoned grain, preferably barley, which is placed in their holes, also in the badger-holes, which the gophers frequent, taking care that it is deep enough to be out of the way of grazing stock and horses. To encourage homesteaders in the destruction of the gopher, it is not uncommon to allow a rebate on the taxes, according to the amount of poison used, which is a decoction of strychnine. So for a couple of days we tramped through and around the edges of our growing crops, armed with old meat-tins containing the deadly stuff and a spoon each. Necessary as it was, the destruction of such natural life by

such means is not pleasant to the thoughtful mind; but the weather was delightful, and it was joy to let the eye wander over the expanse of prairie scrub and bluff, now growing green, and broken here and there by the patches of grain in darker shade than the prevailing colour.

June brought those pests the mosquitoes again, and as there had been little or no rain since the disappearance of winter with its last snowfall, the crops that had been growing so rapidly began to look rather wilted. Folks were not quite so hopeful as they had been, and the few pessimists amongst our neighbours began to make themselves heard.

In the first week of July, however, came some splendid showers, and though there was some thunder, our district was spared the dreaded hail, so the barometer of our hopes began to rise again. We arranged for haying with our friends on No. 9, much as in the previous season, but this year they used what is called a "sweep" to lighten the labour.

As the "sweep," like other implements and methods from the West, is finding a place in British agriculture, illustrating, by the way, how small the world is growing, it may interest some readers if I try to describe it.

Our neighbour Pierre, having had experience

in the use of the "sweep" on a ranch, helped us in its construction and showed us how to use it. We brought out from town three planks twenty feet long, and bolted them together in such a way as to be hauled along the ground on their flat side. To the bottom of these we nailed some short pieces, to run along the ground something in the nature of teeth. At the ends and in the centre we fixed uprights to carry a rail to keep the gathering bunch of hay in front. A chain is attached at each end of the implement, to which a team can be hooked in such a way that it can swing round and draw either the ends or the whole affair backwards or forwards. With this tool immense masses of hay can be drawn together and jammed tight to form a foundation, when a few planks can be placed in an inclined position against the sides, and great heaps drawn on to the lower layer. With two mowing machines, a rake, and the sweep, six of us put up about a hundred tons of hay in a fortnight. It should be noted that the strips forming the teeth project a few inches on each side of the bottom plank, so that, when the teams swing round, the back of the implement becomes the front.

CHAPTER XVIII

A GOOD HARVEST

FOLLOWING the fine rains of early July came a glorious spell of sunshine; and nearly every one we met looked cheerful, in spite of the mosquitoes, which, stimulated by the rain, had become very lively.

Even the two or three grousers and pessimists of our district had little to say, for the shoot blade of wheat had come in good time, and the ears followed in quick succession, and the latter were rapidly filling out. Still, remembering last year, we could not help looking forward with some apprehension to the August full moon.

For weeks past there had been a talk of a shortage of binder twine, and in common with our neighbours we had early ordered a supply, which arrived safely and was brought from town for us by a neighbour. We had anxiously discussed the question whether or not we should order a binder, but on carefully considering the pros and cons, had come to the conclusion not to do

so this season. Our available capital was getting very low, and as two of our neighbours wanted our help in shocking, we arranged with them for one to cut our wheat and the other our oats. A binder is an expensive machine, costing some hundred and forty dollars, and would be lying by all the year except two or three weeks; moreover, though it can be worked by oxen it would need four, and we had only two, and they are much more troublesome and slower than horses for the cumbrous machine.

The season had been so good that some men who had a southern slope were already cutting, even at the risk of shrinkage of grain from its not being quite ripe, so anxious were they to avoid danger from frost. Though the days were hot, we knew the freezing-point was nearly reached on several nights of clear moonlight.

It is said to need six or seven degrees of frost to do much harm, and, of course, as the grain passes from the milky stage into the hard kernel the danger passes too. Fortunately, the sky became overcast during the dreaded days and nights of the period of full moon.

Now for two or three weeks men, women, and the older children, horses, and oxen worked hard from morning to night, and what had been

THE BINDER READY FOR REAPING.

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stretches of golden yellow became stubble fields dotted all over with shocks.

At length there came a time, towards the end of September, when we had the satisfaction of knowing that our wheat and oats were cut and shocked, and it was with a feeling of keen pleasure that we gave ourselves a few days' rest before the hard work of threshing began.

The interval gave Tom an opportunity to indulge his sporting instincts by going after that useful source of autumn food supply, the prairie-chicken, which were now numerous. At first the coveys were tame enough and could be easily stalked among the shocks, and even came close to our shack; but as many were banging away at them, they soon gave more chances to the sportsman's skill. Tom brought home quite a number, and we lived well, for they are capital eating, with a lot of flesh on their breasts, if but little on their legs and wings.

We also took this opportunity to plough out, gather, and house in our cellar our crop of potatoes, which had done well, like the grain crops, in this favourable season.

Not only does such a season as this promised to be bring money directly into the farmer's pocket, but it provides plenty of well-paid work for the pioneer homesteader able and willing

to work, first with the threshing gangs and later a certain amount in hauling grain.

As I have before explained, this is done in co-operation with neighbours; thus the grain grower, working one day with his team on a threshing gang at a neighbour's farm, is engaged in the same work on his own farm on the morrow. The pay for a man and team may be four or five dollars a day, or for a man without a team two and a half or three dollars.

In addition, the railroads run trips at low rates from the East, and many of those who come thus may become permanent settlers.

Should the weather conditions delay operations, when such an influx of hard-up men arrives, provisions may be short and much confusion arise. This season, however, such were the weather conditions that things went smoothly; but Tom and I had one more job to attend to before we could join our threshing outfit, for which we had arranged. This was to build granaries on our homesteads in which to put the grain when threshed. There was no time to be lost, as it meant two trips to town to haul lumber, and this absorbed more of our precious stock of remaining dollars.

Some ten days' hard work saw this job finished, and early one bright, crisp morning we set out

to join the gang. We found twelve men and seven teams, without the farmer's own, which would be used to haul the grain from the threshing machine to the granary. The first day there was naturally some little delay till men and teams began to get into the swing, but it soon went better, and the rapidity with which the great stretches were cleared of shocks and the quantity of grain threshed was prodigious. The work was very hard, and, beginning as early as seven, often extended well into the darkness of the now rapidly shortening days. Though the Western separator may not clean grain with the perfection of the British threshing machine, it is a wonderful example of efficiency in labour saving and capacity of output. A sheaf-carrier carries the sheaves along as they are tossed by the men from the loads on each side, and the band-cutter cuts the twine, while the wind-stacker blows the threshed straw on to a stack that grows as high as a small church.

The high bagging mechanism raises the grain so that it runs down a spout into the waiting wagon in bulk, whence it is hauled to the granary, or if near the railroad it may be to the elevator direct. This outfit was well organized, and had a caboose and cook to prepare the meals, and as most of the men were neigh-

bours, we were a cheery crowd and got on famously.

Hard though the work was, our muscles became inured to it as the work proceeded, and at night we rolled ourselves up in our blankets and slept in granary, barn, or stable, as seemed most convenient.

Every hour was of importance, as if the snow fell it would stop us for the time at least, and digging shocks out of snowdrifts is no pleasant task, as last season's experience had shown us. In short, it was a good season, a bumper crop with good harvesting and threshing conditions, and, as one of our fellow-workers remarked, "If all seasons were like this one, prairie farming would be a snap." In a few cases the wheat was a bit tough, being a little late in maturing, and in one case we had to pull out and leave it for a time; but on the whole it went well. In due course we came to Tom's homestead, and it was a real joy to see the yellow grain pouring into the wagon-box. It went twenty bushels to the acre, so we had the pleasure of safely housing in the new granary about a thousand bushels. The yield may seem small to the farmer of the Lothians or the Eastern Counties, but it must be remembered that early cultivation is not equal to his, though there are cases

in which forty, fifty, and even sixty bushels are threshed from the acre. Later followed the threshing of our oats on my homestead, and we were rewarded with a crop of seven hundred bushels from the twenty acres. As we finished our wheat there was a heavy dew falling, so it was considered safe to fire the straw stacks, and in this way we celebrated the occasion and got rid of the straw at the same time.

The glare lit up the night for miles round, and ours was not the only one that night, for away to the south many such glares could be seen, and, indeed, at this season all over the North-West enormous quantities of straw are burnt. It seems a great waste, but is at present the only way to get rid of the stuff.

Fall ploughing had begun in many parts as threshing drew to a close; and the young settler needs to realize that though he has his second year's breaking ready for next year's crop, or should have, the stubble is by no means ready. It is true that a second year's crop is often put in on stubble in some districts, but in others this practice is a very doubtful expedient. We had reached mid-November, and, splendid as the fall had been, winter was now on us, and we had a little leisure to consider how we stood.

It is needless to trouble the kind reader with elaborate profit and loss account and balance-sheet; indeed, the pioneer farmer soon realizes that the work he is engaged on is far too much of a gamble for such an excellent practice as drawing up these documents to aid him much. Not that he should not take careful stock of his position and put it down in figures as far as possible.

Speaking roughly, on the debit side of the account must be placed two seasons of hard work and the expenditure of about two hundred pounds, or, say, a thousand dollars, while on the credit side, in addition to our live-stock, consisting of the two working oxen, we had Nancy and her fine foal, our cow and calf, and our implements, for which, however, we owed about seventy dollars on notes. Then we had put in about half the term needed to make our homesteads freehold, though this did not mean that when we had fulfilled the three years' duties and got our deeds or patents, as they are called, we could sell them for anything like their value. Such a sale depends on a variety of circumstances, liable to great fluctuations. It is true we might raise a loan on that doubtful blessing, a mortgage, with which to improve our farms.

Finally, in considering our assets, there were

our wheat and oats, in theory said to be like ready money on delivery at the elevator in town. We had, however, long realized that while the term "bumper harvest" sounds golden, "all is not gold that glitters," in such a case. The men who needed money, and most of them did, rushed to realize at least a part of their harvest; the railroads and elevators became choked, in spite of the capacity of the former for moving large quantities of grain rapidly, and, worst of all, the price had gone very low—oats as low as twenty-five cents a bushel in town, while wheat was so low that, after paying for threshing and seed, it was, to say nothing of hauling and the labour of growing, evidently unremunerative. The fact is that prices, governed as they are by the world markets and local conditions, fluctuate to an extraordinary extent. As we wanted some ready money for groceries for the winter, we decided to haul one load at least of our wheat to town and see what we could get for it. This proved to be fifty cents a bushel, and the grade No. 2 Northern, though our elevator friend made some demur about taking it at all, as he was so full.

Twenty-five dollars was, indeed, little enough for the load of fifty bushels, but we were not altogether discouraged, as we could hold on a

while longer and there was every probability that prices would improve in the spring both for oats and wheat. This is often the case, especially if there is any prospect of world shortage, but hauling grain in the spring is against the grower, as that is, of course, the season when he wants to be busy on the land. There was every prospect, too, that the new railroad so long under construction would soon be open, thus shortening our haul by one half. This proved to be the case: an elevator and livery barn were soon erected, stores were being run up, and great was the rejoicing when a couple of months later the first train came through. We were also somewhat encouraged by the prospect of getting some reward, in co-operation with our No. 9 friends, for our enterprise in getting the "Marquis" wheat, by selling some for seed in the district. This, too, materialized later, as we got rid of about three hundred bushels to neighbours and others who came considerable distances, averaging for it a dollar a bushel. Ultimately, the remainder, except what we required for our own seed, fetched seventy cents as No. 2 Northern at the elevator in the new town, while the oats we did not require brought forty cents a bushel at the same place. To sum up, in spite of our hard work, we felt encouraged with the result of our labours and

A GOOD CROP OF OATS.

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that we had not done so badly; but it will be evident to the reader who has followed me thus far that the position would have been very, very different and very much worse had the season been like the previous one. This illustrates the gambling nature of grain growing, especially wheat, for the early settler in most districts.

Of course, this applies especially to the newer districts, for not only does the land appear to become more mellow with increased and more extended cultivation, but as the farmers become more established the bad seasons do not affect them in the same way, as they are in a better position to stand a loss, which may be more than recouped by good seasons.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCLUSION

If it is true that one half the world does not know how the other half lives, surely the saying applies to what is called the British Empire, so I make no apology for offering a few concluding remarks, which may, I trust, add to the knowledge of the British reader as to life in the great Western Dominion.

In the first place, it must not be assumed that the two somewhat extreme seasons which I have tried to depict, as illustrating our early prairie experiences, exhaust the weather conditions of the Prairie Provinces. We had gone there impressed with the idea that we should have to deal with dry-farming conditions, under which the conservation of the moisture in the soil was a very important factor towards the harvesting of a bumper crop. Now, although our experience did not bear out this idea, I am far from suggesting that there may not be many seasons when it is very necessary. I have heard the

remark of an old-time rancher repeated to the effect that he had known a season when, owing to the drought, there was not a blade of grass over a stretch of twenty miles in our district. Then, again, we had personal knowledge and sad experience of one June frost, which ruined many plots of growing potatoes and greatly damaged wheat and oat crops. In short, I would strongly urge settlers who intend growing crops to procure from the Government at Ottawa or the Experimental Farms records of climatic conditions for past years and make a careful study of such.

A second remark I wish to make is that events move rapidly in many districts, and though the conditions I have attempted to describe may seem very primitive to a British reader, it need not be assumed that they remain so long. A few years may in some districts see houses, barns, and farm buildings superior, in my opinion, for the purpose for which they are intended, to many on British farms taking the place of log shacks and stables.

So rapidly, too, do events move, legislative enactments tending materially to improve the conditions of life may quickly be passed. This is illustrated by a recent Act which has, I believe, been passed in Saskatchewan and other pro-

vinces, authorizing any four municipalities to raise funds for the building of a common hospital between them.

It would seem, too, that the farmers' co-operative elevator company has proved a great success, at least in relieving the farmer from some of the disabilities and remedying some of the grievances to which I have referred in the preceding pages. In some districts, too, co-operative stores and societies have made great strides, though it is difficult to bring about some of these needed changes without "treading on some one's toes"; but if the men and women who are making the country, as the saying goes, are to have a square deal, they must come. If newspapers speak truly, the Hudson Bay Railroad is nearing completion, and should form a very important link between the Prairie Provinces and the markets of Europe.

I believe, too, there was a brief notice in the Press very recently to the effect that the Dominion Government had acquired the control of the Grand Trunk and Canadian Northern Railroads, and it will surely tend to the betterment of the prairie-dweller if the great network of railroads which is spread over the plains, including the outlets to tide-water and the States, can be wisely worked in the interest of producer

and consumer, instead of the vested interests of shareholders merely. With all this, however, the farmer in any country is surely well advised to bear in mind that he stands at the door of the food storehouse of the race. In his desire to produce for profit, and so swell his bank account, is he not too apt to forget that in so far as he can produce for his own and his family's use his position is a singularly independent one?

The thought of wealth as expressed in dollars and cents seems to have a hypnotizing effect, making us overlook the fact that the commodities we need and use are really the material wealth, and that really comfortable food, clothing, firing, and shelter are of more value than a big bank account. Thus, Tom and I had emigrated with the hope of making a lot of money by wheat growing, but as the months and years passed, we came to realize that our bread baked from our own flour, our butter, milk, and cream, eggs and bacon, all produced on our own homestead, also our cured or frozen bacon and beef, our own or our neighbour's production, bulked largely on the credit side of our account. One could easily extend this list, and it was none the less welcome for the thought that it escaped the profit of the middleman and the competitive system.

Of course, I am not blind to the virtues of the

division of labour and production on a large scale, but may not the extreme complexity of modern commerce and the industrial system tend to nullify the advantages it possesses? Nor would it appear that what one may be allowed to call the "food of the soul" is the product of material wealth. I am conscious that in touching on the question of education I may be venturing out of my depth, but I cannot help wondering if our modern system, as practised on the prairie and elsewhere, is producing a really finer type of men and women than, say, the old Scotch system, to which surely Canada owes so much. If the prairie-folk are wise they will surely see to it that, however laborious and strenuous the spring and summer may be, the cold days and long evenings of winter will be fraught with educational value to the younger generation at least. Libraries of good reading should also be available at all schoolhouses. One does not want to depreciate newspapers, giving news of the outside world, but surely much of it is ephemeral and waste of time.

During the last two decades enormous amounts of borrowed capital have poured into the Prairie Provinces. From this and the labour of immigrants on the bountiful soil have sprung some growing cities, many considerable towns, and

hundreds of miles of railways. But, marvellous as is this wonderful transformation, ought we not to realize that it is but the framework of a nation, the real materials of which are men and women, millions yet to come? Mistakes there may have been, but, on the whole, surely we may say the foundations of the building have been well laid.

At present we see a good deal of that type of materialism, akin, it may well be, to virtue, which is apt to characterize the settling up of new lands. Let us be thankful, too, that blended with this there is running a thread of idealism indicating a conception of something better than we are accustomed to in our Old-World civilizations. It is probably nowhere more in evidence than among the men and women scattered over the prairie in farmhouses and lonely shacks, where, combined with wonderful personal heroism and devotion, let us trust it will increase and multiply.

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